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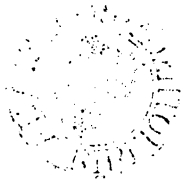
# MONTAIGNE THE ESSAYIST.



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MICHEL LE MONTAIGNE.

LONDON CHAPMAN & HALL 1858.

# MONTAIGNE THE ESSAYIST.

## A Biography.

BY

BAYLE ST. JOHN.

With Illustrations.

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

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# PREFACE.

THERE remains very little for me to say by way of Preface, except that this contribution to the biographical history of French literature is intended to be the first of a series, which, when completed, will form a view of the formation and variations of opinion, prejudice, character, taste, and, to a certain extent, manners in France, from the time of Rabelais to that of Rousseau.

But I take this opportunity of recording my thanks to M. and Madame de Curial for the hospitable manner in which they received me during my visit to the Château de Montaigne; and to Mr. Henry Wallis — whose excellent

painting of the interview between the Essayist and Marie de Gournay, all visitors to the last Exhibition of the Academy will remember — for the sketch of the interior of Montaigne's Tower, which forms the frontispiece of the second volume. The Portrait is taken from a published copy of the original painting on wood, in the possession of Dr. Payen; whom also I thank, though I have not the pleasure of knowing him, for the great assistance I have derived from his "Researches."

B. St. J.

*Paris, November* 1857.

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# MONTAIGNE THE ESSAYIST.

## A BIOGRAPHY.

much influence on
ption, perhaps, of
says are known in
substance f readers who can
decipher their idiomatic [illegible] udded with Gascon
phrases, or relish the quaint old English translations
by Florio and Cotton, however modernised. From
Shakspeare and Bacon, down to the humblest essayist
earnest enough to make man the theme of his specu-
lations, we find traces of communion with Montaigne.
His acquaintance is sometimes acknowledged, oftener
implied. Butler and Pope quote, but Swift and
Sterne show that they were familiar with him. There
is something marvellously fascinating in his society,

which explains this influence far more than any poverty of thought in our great writers. No man can pass an hour with him without feeling wiser and more inclined to be sententious. The range of his observations was so vast, that to borrow from the Essays seems equivalent to borrowing from the collective experience of humanity. Montaigne would have been the last man to complain of such treatment; for if all his successors, especially in our island, have taken from him, he took from all his predecessors. We are never sure, when we open the Essays and are dazzled by some saying that sparkles like a diamond, whether we should admire Plutarch, Seneca, or Montaigne. To point out, therefore, that English writers are under obligation to this wonderful speculator, is not to diminish their value but to show that it is a debt of gratitude in us to study his career.

There are some features in the Biography of Montaigne which have become part of the tradition evoked to the memory of most serious readers by his name.

That he came into the world sixty years after the discovery of printing, forty after the discovery of America, and fifteen after Luther preached his reform; that he was made the subject of a singular experiment in education; that his early life was distinguished by a sort of heroic friendship for Estienne de la Boëtie—the greatest man of that age; that he retired from the turmoil of courts to studious seclusion in his ancestral

mansion; that he wrote a series of desultory Essays on Man, drawing materials chiefly from observation of his own character; that he was the first to circulate sceptical ideas in a popular form, and yet that he is still claimed as a good Catholic by the Church, still suspected by fanatical free-thinkers; that, whilst some religious men have condemned him for his doubts, others, as religious, have loved him for his honesty;—all these things are incorporated in the history of literature. It is also pretty generally known, that great uncertainty exists about most actual facts in the biography of the Essayist which he has not himself communicated; and yet that he has a retinue of admirers, in whom admiration often degenerates into mania, and who devoutly spend their days in searching for traces of his footsteps.

But the truth is, that the life of Montaigne has generally been studied in an antiquarian spirit. Much material has been unearthed,—like the miscellaneous fragments of a temple discovered beneath Egyptian loam,—but no one has undertaken the task of restoration. I may claim to have laboured in both ways. During fifteen years, every interval of repose has been occupied in this study—charming intervals, though often unblessed by any valuable result; and if no manuscript journal, note, or register, has been first stripped of its dust by me,—if no local tradition of importance has met my ear after escaping the diligence of provincial enthusiasm, I believe that these volumes contain a narrative entirely new. The whole field of

the literature of the sixteenth century in France has been questioned for purposes of illustration and interpretation; and many casual statements of the Essayist himself have been listened to for the first time with due curiosity. My object has been, not merely to paint a moral and intellectual picture of those times, but strictly to elucidate the chronology and incidents of the life of Montaigne—his character, his literary and philosophical intentions, his relations with contemporaries, the influences he received and imparted—to produce, in fact, a complete body of information, which may worthily serve as an introduction to the works of so remarkable a man.

In another place will be found recapitulated the principal sources of information from which I have drawn; but I think it right to mention here the names of three laborious students, whom I shall often be compelled to refute, but who have done good service in bringing together materials for the lives of Montaigne and La Boëtie—M. Léon Feugère, M. Grün, and Dr. Payen. Of the last-mentioned an English writer has recently most justly observed: "His name, like that of Mademoiselle de Gournay, must ever be associated with that of Montaigne." When in 1844 I undertook this work, after publishing the first chapter I relinquished it, feeling that the state of knowledge at that time was incomplete. Having collected, by patient reading, a vast quantity of notes, I met at last with Dr. Payen's pamphlets, containing much that was new, and enabling me to fill up many lacunes. With this assist-

ance, and that of the two other learned persons I have alluded to above, not to mention here minor authorities, I fearlessly pushed on to its end this investigation; which has given me, I must confess, all the delight of a search for Treasure.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ANCESTORS OF MONTAIGNE.

THE narrative of the life of Michel de Montaigne takes us at the outset into Perigord, a region of France, on the state and manners of which towards the beginning of the sixteenth century but a dim light is shed. A sort of morning mist spreads over it, and we can only just see a few figures moving amidst colourless objects. Perigord was one of the least prosperous and civilised portions of that great province created by the English under the name of Guyenne, and including the Bordelais, Saintonge, the Agenais, Quercy, Perigord, and Limousin,—with Bordeaux for a capital. Perigord had some broad, open plains, where armies might manœuvre and truffle-hunters wander, but most of its hills were covered with forests of chestnut-trees, furnishing a food which the peasantry and the swine they tended consumed in common. Many parts were wild and uninhabited; but near the roads between the fortified towns, and especially along the banks of the Dordogne, numerous seats of the nobility and gentry were scattered—all

battlemented, and moated, and garrisoned, even in time of peace. The province was famous, as it long continued to be, for the narrow patriotism of its inhabitants, their attachment to local privileges, and proneness to resist the encroachments of a central power. Frequently this turbulent spirit was encouraged by the great families, whilst at other times it was directed against them. Perigord has some Jaqueries of its own to record.

On a *tertre*, or eminence, overlooking the retired valley of the Didoire, that winds away northward from the great basin of the Dordogne, the château of Montaigne seems to have risen from time immemorial, outliving dynasties and revolutions, and receiving a succession of families to which it has more than once given a name.

In the sixteenth century it belonged to the Eyquems, or rather to a branch of that house, once so important in Guyenne. Michel was the son of Pierre Eyquem, usually stated to have belonged to a branch that had preserved its nobility intact, whilst others maintain it to have derogated so far as to exercise trade in the preceding century. The question, so idle in the eyes of formal moralists, is interesting to biography. When we see a man step out into the light of fame, we naturally seek some knowledge, not only of the paths he has himself trodden, but of the wanderings of his family, their meetings, their alliances, their adventures in obscurity. We inherit more than existence from our forefathers.

The finest fruits have some flavour of the soil in which they grow. And it is scarcely possible duly to appreciate the career of the Gascon Essayist without knowing the exact social position from which he started.

We are met, at the threshold of our inquiries, by the startling assertion of Scaliger: "Montaigne's father was a herring-monger." This phrase, gathered from the testy savant's conversation and usually quoted as a calumny, should be considered as a mere joke; based however, there can be no doubt, on some fact well known at that time. It is scarcely serious to say, that if the statement were literally true "Montaigne would lose nothing, and herring-mongers would gain a great deal." Real liberality is not so squeamish. We want to know whether the Essayist was a gentleman of old family or of new family, whether he had good hereditary claim to nobility and was entitled to talk of his escutcheon, or whether he was really but two removes from a worthy merchant of the city of Bordeaux, and therefore garrulous about his new dignity. It is a curious illustration of the uncertainty of our knowledge about times comparatively recent, that the most industrious research has not been able definitively to appease dispute.

We know that there existed a very extensive noble family, whose name under various forms — as Ayquem, Eyquelm, Eyquem — is frequently alluded to in the history of the province of Guyenne. As far back as the time of the Black Prince we find it mentioned, and

it occurs in every list of wine-proprietors to this day. We may even now see it written over the shops of tradesmen on the quays of Bordeaux; and the first impression certainly is, that it must be "essentially of Gascon origin." But we observe in various French biographies the evidence of a very unsettled state of mind on this subject; and an incautious Englishman might easily be betrayed into claiming Montaigne as a countryman. If we stand aside and do not interfere, we may, perhaps, have him handed over to us at last. Already the name of Eyquem, suspected on account of its foreign aspect, has been referred to Flanders; where, indeed, it is found under a slightly different form. But what connexion had Flanders ever with Gascony? and shall we forget that the English created the province of Guyenne, and occupied it for hundreds of years? It was easy to make Eyquem of Oakham; the suggestion of Egham is not absurd; and if all fail we have the statement, which I am unable to verify, that Eyquem is a Scotch word signifying "Mountain!" Molière *was* of British origin, therefore Montaigne *may* have been. He himself tells us, indeed, that he was connected with an English family; mentions that he had relatives in England; and adds, that in consequence of our long occupation of Guyenne the people of his neighbourhood had much intermarried with us; even that in his own house there still remained traces of "this ancient cousinhood." It is, perhaps, worth observing, as evidence to change of man-

ners, that Montaigne claims relationship with England in a tone implying a certain pride.

The family name of the Essayist being known to have been Eyquem, the discussion turns, among antiquaries, on the period at which his predecessors became possessed of the château in the valley of the Didoire. There are some contradictions in the testimony brought forward, but the probability is that they were established there for centuries. From the fact that their dwelling-place crowned an eminence they were called the Eyquems of the Mountain, or simply the Seigneurs de Montaigne — a Petrus de Montanha is mentioned as doing homage for the estate in 1306— and this title, it is likely, was adopted gradually by them, without any new letters of knighthood to distinguish them from the too-numerous Eyquems. Michel himself gives an account of the process by which such mutations usually took place, and severely blames the custom, to which he was obliged to yield, of calling every one by the name of his estate. "Thus are families confounded and origins obscured," he says, proceeding to direct the point of his wit against parvenus, for whom illustrious genealogical titles, unknown to their fathers, are at once found when they have become rich and powerful.

By dropping the name of Eyquem, and assuming that of Montaigne, the family succeeded in isolating itself from its relatives, more or less distant; but, to its annoyance, often became confounded with other

families who had derived their titles from similar local circumstances, and had no connexion of blood with them whatever. The care with which the Essayist points out this fact will appear puerile only to those who do not know that there was a man of the same name, a maistre-d'hostel of the Duke of Guise, who had earned an infamous celebrity in the pamphlets of the time as the instigator of the massacre of Vassy, the real beginning of the religious wars in France. Montaigne, however, carefully avoids alluding to this wretch; and tells us merely that there was a family at Montpellier and Paris called Montaigne, and another in Brittany and Saintonge. It may be observed parenthetically, that when Oliver St. John, some time Chief Justice of England, went to live in exile with his wife at Montpellier, he assumed the name of Monsieur Montaigne. At the very time at which the Essays were written there existed in England, as I find from a MS. in the British Museum, a George Montaigne, D.D., Master of the Savoy Hospital; and another contemporary, also called George Montaigne, is mentioned as the author of a book on the Poor of Paris. The secretary of Catherine de Médici is now well known. Towards the end of the century the name is of frequent occurrence in the history of Bordeaux.

The negligence of the Canon Prunis has been deplored, because, having before him certain documents in which the Eyquems of Montaigne—always called Damoiseaux, or gentlemen who were not knights—were traced back to A.D. 1400, he neglected to copy

them. It seemed as if we scarcely required all this—hardly possible, at any rate, that Dr. Payen, after spending his life in studying Montaigne's, should imagine that the documents above-mentioned referred to certain fabulous Montanhas, not to the Eyquems. Michel himself tells us that most of his ancestors were born at their favourite residence of Montaigne, and intimates that his great-grandfather was born there in 1402. He even enters into detail, stating that his great-grandfather lived nearly to the age of eighty, his grandfather to that of sixty-nine, and his father to that of seventy-four; and implies, as strongly as language can, that they were all born, brought up, and all died near the same hearth, and under the same roof. But in the absence of legal proof that the Montaigne estate belonged to the Eyquems before 1473, it has been suggested that by "ancestors" Michel means his uncles and aunts: no allusion is made to the three generations; and we are introduced to some quaint old gentlemen of the Eyquem stock, Ramons and Grimons, who were merchants and citizens of Bordeaux towards the middle of the fifteenth century. Ramon Eyquem was called in his will, "*Ramon Ayquem, marchant, parropiant de la gleysa de Sent Miqueu et borgues de Bordeu.*" A Ramon de Gaujac, *alias* Locodot, is also called merchant; and Isabeau de Verteuil, niece of Grimon, married one Dufleys, a merchant. All these personages appear by a flickering light, and we cannot exactly say how they stand or where they are standing. But it is probable that, as

in Brittany, a noble origin was no impediment to trading in Guyenne, and that the Perigord squires had always houses and interests engaged—perhaps ships, perhaps fishing-boats, or herring-smacks, at Bordeaux. It is curious that one chronicler makes Scaliger say that Montaigne descended from a fisherman of Brittany, who set up as a herring-monger in the quarter of La Roussette, where still exists a blind alley called Montaigne.

These traditions, vague though they be, evidently point all one way—towards facts which are themselves concealed from us. We may be certain that the Eyquems earned their right to be called burgesses of Bordeaux by trade of some kind, but this does not in reality disprove the nobility of the family. At any rate, we can infer nothing positive from the fact that the estate of Montaigne, the possession of which conferred nobility, is not mentioned in the will of Ramon Eyquem, whilst it afterwards appears in the possession of Grimon. The estate of Mattecoulon was not mentioned in the will of Pierre Eyquem, because he gave it to his son, Bertrand Charles, brother of our Michel, during his own lifetime. Be this as it may, if Ramon seems something mythological in character, Grimon comes out into historical clearness. He is called in old documents a "nobleman," and "lord of Montaigne;" and we may safely award victory in argument to the patient and ingenious men who have thought it worth while to make a stand for the gentleness of his blood. In the absence, indeed, of direct proof, knowing as we

do the swarm of Eyquems that existed, and the commonness of such names as Ramon, we cannot refer to the family of our philosopher every document in which a Ramon Eyquem is mentioned.

We shall observe, whilst following Montaigne through his varied intellectual career, that he never ceases any moment to remember that he belonged to a privileged class. He was proud of the distinction, and grateful for it. It was, indeed, something in those days to be a gentleman. The position was a pedestal and a vantage-ground. We may fairly suspect, moreover, that had Montaigne been less independent of the world's more vulgar cares than he was, he would never have written,—or written anything but philosophical essays. There was at first something menial in the position, and there remained something menial in the tone of many of the other writers of the sixteenth century. Montaigne speaks with the ease, not to say flippancy, of a man who has a dozen farms inherited from his ancestors; and who knows that no one can say a word as to his origin. He is evidently the representative of a long line of country squires, who from the time of the English conquest had lived in that retired nook of country, almost out of the track of armies,—not utterly isolated, but keeping up a connexion with the capital of the province, and never failing to offer their services to their sovereign when there was a prospect of glory, booty, or adventure. The continued existence of this family on the same estate, in the same house, through a period so full,

according to public histories, of troubles and tempests—when we imagine the population to have been unstable as water—reminds us that society is rarely ever stirred to its depths; and that even when we read of Ruin and Disaster sweeping over a whole country, we must remember that those terrible visitants generally travel by the highway.

In the Middle Ages all families of any power or wealth, moreover, built, as I have said, castles or fortified mansions, round which the tide of devastation flowed. The dwelling of the Eyquem family appears always to have been sufficiently strong to resist sudden attacks, and was in the neighbourhood and under the protection of more imposing fortresses. But during the period immediately preceding that which we are now about to examine, comparative tranquillity had blessed the province. Country gentlemen could leave their doors open and go forth into their orchards, unbraced, without a morion on their heads.

## CHAPTER III.

### ADVENTURES AND CHARACTER OF PIERRE EYQUEM.

GRIMON EYQUEM was born about 1440 and died before 1509, as we learn, says Dr. Payen, from an "order of revelation" emanating from Pope Leo the Tenth, insisting that all who knew of debtors to the estate should reveal them, under pain of excommunication. Pierre Eyquem appears to have been the eldest son of Grimon. He had three brothers—the Sieur de St. Michel, who died young; the Sieur de Bussaguet, conseiller in the Court of Parliament, who, though apparently the strongest in health, died because he put himself into the hands of the doctors; and the Seigneur de Gaviac, a churchman, who lived long because he had a wholesome aversion to medicine. His nephew, with an odd mixture of gravity and irony, tells us that the said lord of Gaviac, having been once seized with a violent fever, was informed by the doctors that if he would not comply with their prescriptions all was over with him. "Then I am a dead man already," he exclaimed. But having, it would appear, declined their services, he recovered by the grace of God. Montaigne belonged

to a family, most of whom were humoristic opponents of the medical art. We shall presently see that many other of his humours — for he was essentially a humorist — were, to a certain extent, home crotchets. One of his great charms is, that he makes himself the exponent of a little body of doctrine, forged in that small retired society, in a retired place, by a family of oddities; whose oddities were often genial views of life and intuitive perceptions of how its comforts might be increased.

It is necessary to trace briefly the career of Pierre Eyquem, touching on those features in his character, position, and adventures, which seem to have most influenced the opinions and the conduct of his son. Brevity in this case is enforced, not only by the laws of proportion, but by scantiness of materials. We know very little of Pierre Eyquem during the active part of his career; yet it was during that period that, in common with so many other of his countrymen, he received a strong intellectual impulse, which, in his case, is communicated through his son, and the famous Essays, even unto us. I allude to his experiences in Italy, whence he brought back, not only his peculiar theory of education, but his fondness for learning generally, and his admiration of learned men.

During the reigns of Charles the Eighth, Louis the Twelfth, and Francis the First, the French spirit of adventure set in a strong current towards Italy. Those kings warred for family and personal objects; and were accompanied and imitated by a vast mass of

the ambitious nobility of the country. Every royal army was swelled by a number of volunteers—young gentlemen of family, who left their homes partly from mere love of fighting, partly impelled by that vague desire of experience which France has so seldom yielded to, but which, in this case, so marvellously influenced its fortunes.

A recent historian picturesquely calls this movement, The Discovery of Italy. And it *was*, morally and intellectually, a discovery. Without adopting the exaggerated language it is the custom to use with respect to the Renaissance—which was a stride in civilisation following on many good steps, but falling far short of its aim—we must admit the peculiar importance of that period in the history of France. The French adventurers in Italy were more simple-minded and susceptible of impression than their heirs; quite as corrupt in manners, but less egotistical; astute and able, but not so aware of their defects and their virtues; more disposed to fraternal intercourse even with enemies. Europe at that time was laying open new empires in the East and West. The world was growing under men's feet as the heavens were deepening to their gaze. France shared little in this grand labour. It had remained shut up in its almost provincial indifference—developing moderate talents in literature and art, small poets and estimable ornamentists, but no men of science of note; great only in bigots, wranglers, and formal philosophers. Italy was a revelation to the nobility and fighting men, though

nct quite a revelation to the artisan, not at all to the trader. Even now Italy is a revelation to poets and moralists who come down the southern slope of the Alps for the first time. We advance under the blue sky dim with light, or beneath an awning of brightly-tinted clouds. White cottages, villas, clustered villages, and steepled cities — though often found silent and weed-grown when we draw nigh — expand, look beautiful, and shine in that brilliant atmosphere, which exaggerates everything. The dusty plain of stubble, with its undergrowth of pale wild flowers, seems like a garden; the expanse of corn, shot with variegated green as the breeze trembles over it, seems like a water-meadow. All the women are waiting by the wayside to be hallowed into Madonnas by some Raphael. Bring with us what prejudices we may, we feel wafted into another world; a world of stronger passions, brighter impressions — warmer and more glittering than our imagination has dared to picture. But what is this to the Italy of the sixteenth century? The severe manners of the Republics — severe, comparatively — had given place to a portentous luxury, never surpassed in modern times, save in some Eastern despotism. Poison and the dagger were often at work, it is true, in gloomy alcoves or dreary porticoes, at night; but these were episodes recorded by the whisper of fear, or rolled along the lower levels of society by the echoing voice of popular rumour. The outside aspect was marvellously gay, and bright, and fascinating. Palaces of marble were decorated with

all the luxury of the goldsmith's art — which exhausted its resources, and then made way for costlier ornaments dug out of the deepest mines of genius. Swarms of princes, and dignitaries, and chiefs, from the Papegaut of the Vatican down to the Gran' Diavolo, who patronised Aretino and introduced him to Francis the First, glittered or rioted amidst brocaded and silken courts—where merriment, and music, and dance, and song, and compassionate beauty, and more refined sources of pleasure, slaked all the senses and stimulated all the faculties of man. There was nothing wanting in that resplendent civilisation, which put on more gorgeous colours at the approach of death—"the last still loveliest"—nothing, save morality. The intellect and the hand alike created miracles; but no high purpose actuated man or society. Italy was a brilliant and cultivated libertine, too old to begin a new career, too hardened to repent; sinking amidst sweet sounds, and perfumes, and down, and gold, and caresses, and the last thrills of pleasure, always so fondly savoured, to a dishonoured grave.

We must not, however, listen to exaggerated reports of the immediate influence of Italy upon the French imagination, or take for granted that the Romans understood that they were witnesses of "a revolution, not of the passage of an army," when they beheld the well-equipped troops of Charles the Eighth march by torchlight amidst fantastic shadows through their long streets. All Italy looked upon the French as barbarians, who came like a storm to destroy, and

would pass away like a storm. The barbarians themselves were impelled chiefly by greed of luxury and gold; and having satisfied their desires, retired for the most part as unimpressed as a wild beast that might seek its prey or its partner amidst the rich tapestries or art-marvels of a palace. Stupid they went, and stupid they came back—yet not quite so stupid in all cases; for, as I have implied, on the imaginations of some, strong impressions, more or less correct and definite, were made. Francis the First is the type of the Frenchman of that period, not of the best or the worse, but of the class susceptible of civilising influences. What a strange personage he seems in the atmosphere of history, which has been able to exaggerate his proportions but not to give dignity to his form or demeanour! A giant boy, with all a boy's cunning and unscrupulousness in the pursuit of pleasure, with some of a boy's naïveté, a boy's courage not safe from panic, a boy's superstition and love of the gaudy and flaunting—all a boy's greed of praise, less than a boy's honour, with a man's cruelty, and a king's selfishness—such seems to me the impression produced of Francis the First by the ordinary official histories. It would even yet be worth while to examine him under a clearer light; but this does not form part of my task, and it is only necessary here to point out in what degree may be received the panegyrics lavished on him as Restorer of Letters and Patron of the Arts. We may accept his father's estimate of him. Louis the Twelfth used to say: "All my labour will be spoiled by that *gros*

*garçon,"* — as who should say a booby, a sort of "lubberly boy," mysteriously destined to occupy the throne. Francis came, perfectly uncultivated, in contact with a very brilliant civilisation; and being possessed of unusual love of praise and fondness for display, with sufficient observation to see whence the brilliance of the Italian courts was derived, determined by an exertion of power, and without any personal sacrifices, to be surrounded, when the society of panders and harlots palled, by artists and men of letters. How much pleasure he found in their works we cannot determine. Probably his vanity only was appealed to: for we are unable to see what place for the pure delights that are derived from art and poetry could be found in the mind of one who was ever in alternate fits of licentiousness and superstition, when he did not combine the two; who has the especial honour of having revived the punishment of heresy by fire; the great proof of whose ingenuity was the invention of the Estrapade—a machine for ducking heretics into the flames and lifting them out again, so that the tortures of martyrdom might be prolonged; whose jaded senses derived but a moderate excitement when he went to a burning, as an English mob goes to a hanging, from the shrieks and struggles of suffering saints. Verily, this bosom-friend of Cæsar Borgia, whose gallantry was that of the mastiff — for instead of courting ladies, he forced his way sword in hand into their chambers, brutally driving the husband away — this smirking, rawboned, apoplectic hero of a country fair, whose portrait disfigures the gallery of

the Louvre—this blusterer, half whose phrases flattery effaces to convert him into a hero—"all is lost except honour .... and life, which is safe"—this savage persecutor, without the excuse of faith, exactly comes up to the idea of a Patron of Letters, who forbids the exercise of the art of printing in his dominions!

The French, like their king, went to Italy because there was fighting to be done and booty to be got there. Some of these adventurers have left narratives of what they did and what they saw, which enable us to appreciate the extent of their action and the nature of their impressions.

Robert de Fleurange, whom we may take as a type of the class, informs us, that having read books that narrated the deeds of doughty knights of old, he was seized with the desire to imitate them before he was ten years of age; and actually went to the court of Louis the Twelfth to offer his services. He was slightly rebuffed by the monarch, who sent him to play at soldiers with young François d'Angoulême, afterwards king, at Amboise. We learn that the two children were put into the same litter, and had a good fight to decide which should get out first, "for the young adventurer thought himself as great a man as the prince." In due time this fiery gentleman obtained permission to cross the mountains and engage in serious battles; and if any one wishes for materials to guess at the kind of experiences which Pierre Eyquem went through at a slightly subsequent period, he has nothing to do but read the memoirs of The Adventurer.

Pierre was born in 1495, but we have no record of the year at which he went to the wars. Probably, like the Adventurer and his companions, who rendez-vou'd at Lyons, he was a mere stripling, and began his soldier's life before 1515. In 1511, it is true, we find him as a lad at Bordeaux writing Latin verses—which indicates a pacific disposition. We can easily imagine that he fought and rode about the country long, without even beginning to understand it. The naïve confessions of the Adventurer are before us, as the best source of illustration. He frequents, during many years, the principal towns of northern and central Italy; and never allows a single allusion to the artistic treasures they contain to escape him, except one, which I cannot forbear extracting:—"Now there was in the city of Bologna, above the portal of the principal church, a pope all in massive bronze, which had been made by order of Pope Julius, big as a giant, and visible from the square. The Bentivogli, annoyed by the sight of it, tied cables to its neck, and by a number of hands hauled it down and broke its back. Thereupon the lord of Bentivoglio began to swear to Monsieur de Nemours and to the Sieur Jacques that he would make the pope belch against his own castle of Bologna; and forthwith had the statue melted, and a double cannon made, which within six days was battering the said castle." With such soldierly indifference to art does this Adventurer write; and I have no doubt that the chief of his companions were of the same kidney. All the rest of his book is filled with

accounts of battles, sieges, surprises, and cruelties—some of which, as the smoking to death of a thousand persons in a cavern by Captain Lerisson, remind one of modern times; and is diversified only by snowball matches at Correggio and Parma.

What part Pierre Eyquem took in all these wars and adventures we know not. He was very probably present at the battle of Pavia; but he does not seem to have returned at once to France after that event. He remained in Italy until towards 1528, but in what capacity it is difficult to guess.

According to a passage in the Essays of his son, he was present at Milan when the people, worn out with disgust at their alternations of misery in different shapes during the wars, were seized with a mania for suicide. Twenty-five heads of houses destroyed themselves in a week; but this appears to have happened at a time when Milan was in the hands of the Spaniards. These ruthless masters tortured with every manner of persecution the citizens on whom they were quartered. The horrors of military occupation had never been felt in so aggravated a form. The Milanese went mad, and hung themselves, or leaped from the terraces of their houses, or cast themselves down wells. The traitor of Bourbon came, and promised deliverance for money. Money was given, but deliverance was withheld. Then the self-destruction of the inhabitants went on. It would be interesting to know in what character Pierre Eyquem was present at all these atrocities. Possibly he was there as a prisoner; and he may

have been taken with so many other gentlemen on the field where Francis the First so easily lost the military reputation he had so easily won.

Pierre Eyquem kept a journal of all his adventures, as well as of all public transactions, during the time of his stay in Italy. Montaigne inherited and used the manuscript, but it was never published. Probably nearly all the references to Italian history made in the Essays were based on this document, which may still exist, and very possibly formed part of the papers found by the Canon Prunis in an old box in the last century at the Château de Montaigne. This box contained the original journal of the travels of Michel himself, and it is likely that the importance of such a discovery quite dazzled the worthy Canon, and diverted him from further search.

Recent historians insist much more than did contemporary writers on the influence of the Italian ladies on the French invaders, and complain of the corrupting influence of beauty. This is an artful way of making the national boast: We came, were seen, and conquered. Pierre Eyquem's experiences were of a different kind. He averred that through all that adventurous time he remained as innocent as a child; and we may believe the statement. He seems in after life to have been by no means squeamish — used, indeed, to talk triumphantly of the extraordinary private adventures that he had had in his time with women of good reputation. "Nature and art had prepared him for a gracious reception with ladies." We have here

a singular picture of family manners in the sixteenth century. Michel, the son, launches forth against the scandalous behaviour of women in his days: Pierre, the father, replies, that the change that had taken place was more in appearance than in reality; "for of old a sense of propriety induced sinners to conceal their sin." In a whole province of any note there was scarcely a woman of bad reputation.

But by his own confession, as we have seen, Pierre Eyquem had no experience of the sex until after his marriage. It was whilst on his way back from the Italian wars, at the age of thirty-three, that he made the acquaintance of Antoinette de Louppes and married her. The union seems to have been a comfortable one in every respect. Many children resulted therefrom. Madame Eyquem was probably a colourless personage; for, except when she increased the family, we find scarcely any other allusion to her until her death is recorded in a manuscript note on the Ephemerides of Beuther, as having taken place at Bordeaux in 1601, seventy-three years after her marriage, and nearly ten years after her son had concluded his long and famous career.

Pierre Eyquem, though fond of the mansion and estate he had inherited from his forefathers, spent a considerable portion of his life at Bordeaux—where he possessed a house and some land in the neighbourhood of the Minimettes. He was a bourgeois within the walls of the city—if a gentleman without. Two years after his return from the wars he was

elected Jurat and Prévôt; and, as we shall see, he continued at intervals, all through his life, to exercise high municipal functions. Pierre was essentially a man of order and rule. Besides employing a man to keep a register of the business of his household, in which were set down all petty accounts and payments, and all such bargains as did not require the assistance of a notary, he made his secretary record in a book every event of any moment, so that day by day were written "the memoirs of his house."

"Very agreeable things to read," says Montaigne, "when time begins to efface the remembrance of things; and very useful to set us right if we are in doubt when such a business was begun, when it was ended; what companies of travellers have passed by, and how many have stopped; our voyages, our absences, marriages, deaths; the receipt of happy or unhappy news; change of most important servants, and such-like matters. This was an old custom which it would be good to revive, each for himself; and I think I have been a great fool to have failed to keep it up."

One of the most interesting documents added by the researches of Dr. Payen to our materials for the Life of Montaigne, is a copy of the Ephemerides of Beuther,—a work commonly used in that time for the record, in blank spaces purposely left after each day's historical reference, of events connected with domestic history. In this volume, published in 1551, there are about forty entries in Montaigne's own hand,

with several by his daughter Eléanore; and the history of the family is even continued in scattered notices up to the beginning of the last century. For many reasons, however, I do not give the notes transcribed from it, though I admit them to be genuine, the importance claimed for them. Montaigne was so uncertain when he wrote, that in many cases he put events down at the wrong date, and was obliged afterwards to erase notes and repeat them elsewhere. He even records, without correction, the death, in 1573, of the Seigneur de Gaviac, whom he states in his Essays to have been alive, at the age of sixty-seven, in 1580—that is, when he, Michel, born in 1533, was forty-seven years of age. Still more remarkably erroneous is the entry No. 30, where the fatal death of three of Montaigne's friends at the battle of Moncrabeau is made to happen on July 27, 1587, whereas this event occurred July 26, 1580. These discrepancies, however, though they induce me never to correct a date mentioned in the Essays on the authority of the newly-discovered Ephemerides, do not, to my mind, diminish the interest that ought to be felt in that document, as illustrating the character of Montaigne, and adding two or three most curious facts to his biography. The philosopher had a natural propensity to forget and confuse dates; but events left on his mind vivid impressions, which were easily coined into vivid language. We may find the origin of such notes as he has set down in the mood of mind produced by the reflections above quoted from

the Essays. "I have been a great fool not to keep a journal," exclaims Montaigne; and so he snatches up the Ephemerides and hastily fills in various blanks, chiefly from memory. On no other supposition can we explain the mistakes made in that volume.

There is something Shandean in the character of Pierre Eyquem as described by his son; but the touches by which it is brought out are so fine, so mixed up with the substance of the Essays, that I can scarcely expect to bring even the chief of them together with much success. At every turn we find the oddities of the father influencing the oddities of the son. There was a great cloak, a heir-loom in that family. Pierre left it to Michel, who wore it in preference to any other. "When I have it on," he used to say, "I seem to wrap myself up in my father." And, indeed, his father seems constantly to have been present with him, modifying and directing his speculations. But this cloak was not the only personal relic he possessed of the worthy gentleman. "Away with the new-fangled notions which make people despise the portraits of their ancestors, the shape of their clothes, and their very arms! *I* keep the family writing-desk, seal, and sword, and have not cast out from my study the long rods which my father used to carry in his hand when he walked about; and if," he drolly adds, "my posterity fail to pay me the same respect, why I don't care; for they will never be able to be so indifferent to me as I shall then be to them."

Pierre Eyquem, according to his son, spoke little,

but well; and now and then adorned his language with allusions to common books, especially Spanish books; among others, a work falsely attributed to Marcus Aurelius. "He had no knowledge of letters"—an expression which I throw entirely on Michel's shoulders. It seems to mean no more than that the worthy Gascon squire was not a savant, but a mere smatterer in learning. He too was, no doubt, educated at college; and we have already seen that he was taught to write Latin verses. In 1511, when scarcely sixteen years of age, he composed some distichs, addressed to Guillaume Piellé, author of a poem on the expulsion of the English from France, which were considered sufficiently good to be printed in the following year. I do not think it worth while quoting them, being content to subscribe to Dr. Payen's opinion, that their author would have made a very fair Bachelor of Arts in the nineteenth century. They are dedicated to one Jean Duras, member of a family with which the Montaignes seem always to have been on terms of intimate friendship.

About the time of Pierre Eyquem's marriage, Marguerite de Navarre, who had shared her brother's dishonour in Spain, but who no longer retained that deplorable hold on his affections which makes us pity and avert our eyes from her, had established her little court at Pau. Here she surrounded herself with learned, wise, and imaginative men—held a perpetual levee of genius and virtue. Her court was not otherwise very brilliant: there was little money to support it. But,

nevertheless, it became celebrated, and, no doubt, much contributed to spread a taste for letters and arts in those southern provinces. Many of the learned men who called at the Château de Montaigne were on their way to or from the court of Navarre. We shall see that at a future period relations of a different kind existed between the two places.

But it was more as a country gentleman than as a savant that Pierre distinguished himself. His demeanour was marked by gentle gravity, humility, and modesty. He was singularly careful of the cleanliness and decency of his person and clothes, whether he appeared on horse or foot. His love of truth was prodigious, his conscience very sensitive, his religion hearty, and rather inclined to superstition than the other extreme. For a man of small stature he was full of vigour, upright, and well-proportioned, of an agreeable countenance, somewhat dark in complexion. In all noble exercises great was his proficiency. He left behind him sticks loaded with lead, with which he was accustomed to practise his arms before he threw the bar or the quoit, or went to the fencing-ground; and he even used shoes with loaded soles, in which he prepared himself for running and leaping. His feats in leaping without running were handed down as little miracles. When he had passed sixty years of age he laughed at the agility of young men—what old man does not?—would vault on horseback in his stuffed gown, go round a table on his thumb, never scarcely went up to his room save at three or

four steps at a time. Michel evidently envied these corporeal qualities, which he could not emulate.

In tastes Montaigne's father differed also somewhat from his son—at least the son insists most on the differences. Pierre was remarkably fond of domestic affairs, and particularly apt for conducting them. I find an illustration of this in the numerous additions he made to his property, which Dr. Payen quotes to show that the family had freshly come into possession. The public library of Bordeaux possesses a register, in which Pierre Perreau, the notary, has inscribed all the acquisitions made by Pierre Eyquem from 1528, the year of his marriage, to 1559. They are no less than two hundred and fifty in number, and their total cost was 4332 livres, 10 sols, and 10 deniers, without counting the corn and other produce given in exchange.

Pierre Eyquem's mind appears to have been fertile in ideas. He once thought of starting a peculiar institution—a sort of Miscellaneous Exchange—which would have been very useful in the absence of the press and the advertising system. There ought, he said, to be a particular place in every city where people who are in want of anything may repair, and have set down their desiderata in a book by a public officer: as, for example, "I want to sell pearls; I want to buy pearls; So-and-so wants a companion in a journey to Paris; such a one seeks a servant of such a nature; I want a master; I want a workman, and so on." Montaigne takes occasion, when noticing this unac-

complished scheme, to bewail the general difficulty of communication in those days, and the sad results to which it sometimes led. "I hear," he says, "that to the great disgrace of our age, under our very eyes, two persons excellent in learning have died, because they had not sufficient to eat—Giraldi in Italy, and Chasteillon in Germany. Yet, I am sure that there exist a thousand men who would have offered them very advantageous conditions to come and live with them, or sent them succour where they were, if their case had been known. The world is not so generally corrupt that there is lack of men who would very heartily use their wealth to succour rare and remarkable persons, whom misfortune has driven to extremity."

The rage for building had at that time seized upon France. Francis the First was in his architectural fit. Pierre Eyquem imitated him in his small way. He was very fond of building at Montaigne, where he was born, and seems to have made many and important additions to the château. Some of the works he undertook Michel carried on to a conclusion, out of mere filial reverence. I must not, however, insist further on the character of Pierre before introducing him in his relations to his son.

## CHAPTER IV.

### BIRTH, AND EARLY EDUCATION OF MONTAIGNE.

MONTAIGNE was an eleven-months' child. He was born, third son of his father, between eleven and twelve o'clock on Friday the last day of February, 1533, "as we now count," says he; "beginning the year in January:" for when he wrote a change had recently been made, the year having previously begun at Easter.

This particular way of mentioning the first event in his history is characteristic of the man, and illustrates the kind of detail in which he thinks it necessary to indulge. From this time forward, indeed,—although he touches but lightly on many of what may be called the public incidents of his life—we are kept fully informed, not only on the development and vagaries of his character, but even on the minutest physical accidents that happened to him. My endeavour will be to chronologise and classify the most interesting revelations he makes; but not always to follow him into the private corners whither his pleasant, but rather audacious garrulity, leads his readers.

The training and education of gentlemen in France up to the sixteenth century, had been admirably adapted to convert them into reckless soldiers or swashing retainers of a court. Indeed, it is only in comparatively recent times that refinement and knowledge have been considered compatible with exalted station. Those were regarded as the most fortunate youths of the French aristocracy who succeeded in being attached as pages to some queen or princess. An inevitable fatality seems to lead persons whose position differences them most from other men, to imitate the baseness of valets. François de Scepeaux, afterward Marshal of France, was brought up as page of honour to Louise of Savoy, mother of Francis the First. All powerful lords, however, kept also, as it were, a school of gentility or servitude; and were willing to receive as retainers any striplings of good family whose parents chose to commit them to their care. Montaigne somewhere speaks of and approves this practice; and as we have no allusion to the education of his elder brothers, and observe no traces of them as mingled with his youthful history, it is probable that they were early disposed of in this manner.

But Michel happened to be born just as Pierre Eyquem was warm on the subject of certain theories of education, which he had brought back from Italy. They had remained some time in abeyance, but now were constantly discussed with the various learned men, who, hearing that his fancy was to imitate in miniature the conduct of Francis the First, as a patron of letters,

habitually called at his château in their wanderings. Having paid homage, it would seem, to the practice of the day, in the case of his first and second born, Pierre determined to experiment on the third, and put certain of his crotchets to the test. This is a character familiar to our minds; and when we read of the somewhat eccentric conduct of this retired soldier, we endeavour to remember where we have met him before, and find at last that he is the type of the inimitable Thomas Shandy.

Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, in France, the subject of education had begun to occupy an important share of attention. Learned works were written thereon in prose and verse. But when Pierre Eyquem undertook to make a prodigy of his infant son by a new process, he must have been regarded, especially in his out-of-the-way province, almost as a madman. No one had as yet ventured to suggest that the stupid routine followed in the schools was not the best system of education possible — save, perhaps, Rabelais. The first work of that wonderful buffoon, the *Chronique Gargantuine*, — which "sold more copies in two months than were sold of Bibles in nine years," — was published just a year before Montaigne's birth. It already contained some excellent ideas, afterwards better developed, and then brought to their perfection in *Pantagruel*. The latter work, which sold three editions in one year, was published in 1533, and may fairly be supposed, by the discussions it must have created, to have influenced Pierre's opinions. Despite

this, however, we must give him credit for great courage and originality. His learned contemporaries did so, after a short time; and the public waited not to imitate until the publication of the Essays. Pierre Eyquem's method was known and discussed by the most eminent professors of the day. I have no doubt the report of it greatly influenced the treatment of Henry the Fourth as an infant; and if we examine the biographies of remarkable men born subsequently in that century—so full of thirst for novelty—we shall almost always find traces of the influence of this example.

The health of Michel's body was thought of before the development of his mind; but his character first of all. Pierre desired to bring up his son with humble and popular notions. He began, therefore, by having him held over the font by persons of the most abject fortune, that he might be under obligations and attached to them. His godfather and godmother, he says, in direct opposition to the servile habit of the time, were chosen, not among princes, but among the peasantry of the neighbourhood. This example was imitated by the parents of Montesquieu, who gave him a beggar for godfather. Of the same humble order naturally was Michel's nurse. He was put to the breast of a poor woman belonging to one of Pierre Eyquem's villages, which still exists to the north of the château, and bears the name of Papessus. A few years ago a house, of a better appearance than the others, used to be pointed out as having belonged to one of the guards of the château; and a minutely ingenious

biographer, forgetting that we are not to seek for any aristocratic distinction whatever in the nurse of Montaigne, conjectures that this said respectable house may have belonged to her.

Michel was kept at the village of Papessus for some time,—even after he was weaned,—in order that he might become accustomed to a hardy common way of life. *Magna pars libertatis est benè moratus venter.* Pierre wished his son to descend from what was rugged and difficult to what was plain and easy; but above all, he wished to ally him in sympathy with the "people," and that condition of men which was in want of his aid. "Let him look," said he, "rather at those who stretch out their arms towards him, than at those whose backs are turned his way." There is something extremely charming in this Utopia of good sense and feeling.

We can have no doubt that such an infantine experience left its mark in Montaigne's character. Perhaps we may partly trace to it his persistent affection for a rough and common style of speaking, as we certainly may those easy and popular manners which took him safely through the civil wars, more effectually than his reputation and his talent. A story they used to tell him at this early period of his life, left a deep impression on his mind. Once upon a time, they said, there lived in a neighbouring land a king, who, having received a beating from above, swore to be revenged on God, and ordered that for ten years no one should pray to him, speak of him, or believe in him! This

apologue was intended to express, not the absurdity, but the pride of a country believed to be Spain; and we may easily conceive the curious applications Montaigne made of it to political and ecclesiastical history.

I would not be supposed to approve without reservation, even at this early period, the peculiar system of training adopted by Pierre Eyquem. It may be that a system of training is condemnable because peculiar. The exaggerated estimation of it in the inventor's mind makes its application inexorable. The material is clipped rigidly according to the pattern; whereas in ordinary cases, the common way being roughly applied by indifferent masters, a sort of general resemblance is all that is required. We are, however, always too apt to forget the production of nature,—the Man that is born—and the necessary development he will take. All schemes for bringing to perfection, suddenly and early, such of our qualities as may be influenced by training, contain a danger that is usually overlooked. We require from the plant a growth incompatible with the nourishing powers of the soil. We have all of us but so much stuff, and if we make use of it to-day shall not have it at hand to-morrow. If the affairs of this world require the presence of clever boys, let us have them; but if not, let boys keep their cleverness to themselves as long as possible. They will require the whole of it in time.

Some natures refuse to lend themselves to the forcing process; and Montaigne's, luckily, seems, to a certain extent, to have been one of these. The boy

met his father's ingenuity by a sort of stolid laziness, an unwillingness to be developed before his time. In after life he boasted of this, though rather as a gentleman indifferent to acquired learning might boast of idleness at school, than as if he perceived exactly of how much value had been to him a negative quality that, no doubt, often drove poor Pierre Eyquem to despair. Yet the philosopher, careful of the reputation of the boy from which he had grown, will not admit that he was stupid because he seemed so. It would have been injustice, he says, to displace him from his rank because he was more heavy and leaden—slower and more unmanageable in learning, not only than all his brothers, but than all the children of his province, both in mental and bodily exercises. He instinctively put on an appearance of stupidity as a cuirass to protect him from the attacks of pedantry. His mind was not inactive. What he saw, he saw well; and under a heavy complexion indulged in bold imaginations and cherished opinions beyond his age. But he was incommunicative, digesting his thoughts in solitude and keeping his firm appreciation of things to himself. This is why in his school days he got among his companions a reputation for absurd pride. The experience of boys and men teaches us that we are never judged so severely for the vices that we show, as for those which are attributed to us because of our reserve. We can have no doubt that Montaigne's dislike of sweets and all kinds of confectionary as a child was attributed to a depraved taste; and that when, by the operation of a natural incredulity, he refused to

believe in stories of ghosts, prognostics, and enchantments, he was accused of mere dulness.

We may be quite certain, at any rate, that when Pierre Eyquem determined that his son should be brought up as no other child had ever been, Michel was placed in imminent danger of flashing forth as a prodigy, or of becoming absolutely null. The stolidity of which he was afterwards, even in the midst of his boastings, somewhat ashamed, seems to have been nothing but the modest attitude of a virgin mind resisting a too early attack on its chastity. With that protection he at once warded off and profited by his young experiences.

These remarks apply to the whole six years of his infancy, during which the educational mania of his father was in its full fervour. We shall presently watch the forcing process to which he was subjected, but a detail must come in here that contrasts with the hardening process noticed at the beginning of this chapter. In order to save Michel from the unpleasant start with which a rough shake or a loud call usually brings back childhood from the deep depths of slumber, his father caused him always to be awakened by the sound of some musical instrument playing under his window. Parental affection, in whatever quaint company, adopting, as it were, the machinery of the gallantry of that age to express itself, suggests a very touching picture; and I am fond of thinking of this athletic little oddity of a squire appearing with a musician at early dawn on the terrace of his tree-embowered castle, and giving the signal of some sweet strain.

## CHAPTER V.

### HOW MICHEL STUDIED THE HUMANITIES.

PIERRE EYQUEM, like most of the people of his generation who had any respect for learning at all, laid great stress on the acquisition of the classical languages. At that time, not to know Latin at any rate, was to be ignorant; and the race of men is not yet extinct who look with profound contempt upon all unfamiliar with that language. It is true, popular prejudice is now inclined to run the other way; the indolence of men of letters cheerfully accepts this license to avoid study; and a vague use of our language is beginning to introduce itself. The curious bias given to the meaning of words in America no doubt has the same origin. Perhaps the time has come for some one to preach with authority that English is anchored, as well as French, on a Latin bottom; and that if we cut the cables our words will necessarily begin to drift.

In this particular, Michel had reason to be thankful for being made the subject of experiment. His father took pity in his person on the infant of all future time, thinking that it was difficult enough to learn at all,

without having to contend with artificial obstacles. In those days learning Latin was a species of torture. There were no grammars in the vernacular. Isidore of Seville, Donat, and other middle-age grammarians, were alone used for the purposes of instruction; and, as some one has ingeniously remarked, their books being written in Latin, children were obliged, in order to learn that language, to proceed from the unintelligible to the unknown. Port Royal first introduced the use of grammars in French; but that venerable institution laboured for another age; and Pierre Eyquem was obliged to invent a system of his own, which his son afterwards set forth with the express object of provoking imitation; for in the ordinary way, Latin and Greek, however useful, were "bought too dearly."

Michel's narrative is very interesting. He says that his father made all the inquiries it was possible for a man to make, among people of learning and understanding, for the best method of education; which shows that his eccentricity consisted, not so much in inventing anything himself, as in perceiving the inconvenience of common plans, and going to the right source for information. In this case his learned friends pointed out to him the absurdity of the system usually applied; and with agreeable pedantry assured him, that if modern men did not reach the grandeur and the knowledge of the old Greeks and Romans, it was because of the time the former were obliged to spend in learning languages which cost the latter nothing! "I don't think this is the only cause,"

says Montaigne, in a sly parenthesis. However, he approves of the expedient which his father discovered, or agreed to apply. Even whilst he was at nurse, before he could utter a word—probably, therefore, before he was brought back from Papessus—the little Michel was put under the charge of a German, who afterwards became celebrated as a medical doctor in France, but who at that time had not learned a syllable of French and was a mighty Latinist. We are now transported into quite a Pedant's Utopia. This German—we can imagine him with his fair face and flaxen locks—was sent for from beyond the Rhine on purpose; and, being well paid, thought it not beneath his dignity to be continually dandling the little Michel in his arms—scolding or coaxing him in the language of Terence and Plautus. To ease his learned biceps two other professors, less knowing but quite capable of keeping up a perpetual supply of Latin, were associated with the German; and these three continually wandered along the banks of the Didoire, or amidst the woods towards Papessus, labouring to preserve the small Michel from the necessity of ever using a grammar or a lexicon. His ears were carefully protected from any scrap of French or Perigord dialect. When he waxed older, and was finally installed at the château, with strength to toddle from room to room and escape from the parlour to the kitchen, all the family, from poor colourless Antoinette de Louppes down to the turnspit, were compelled to discourse within hearing of the

babe in nothing but Latin. Pierre Eyquem brushed up his knowledge for the occasion; and when he, the mother, the valet, or the chambermaid, was unable to find classical expressions for modern wants and ideas, the law was, Silence! By degrees Necessity proved an excellent teacher. The whole establishment, urged by the hatred of taciturnity common to human nature, grew tolerably proficient. Whoever came in contact with Michel was Latinised; and to such an extent that many words actually spread among the neighbouring villages—names of workmen and tools—and remained in ordinary use, even to the day when Montaigne looked back to that rare time of pedagoguish enthusiasm, and recorded all these doings for the benefit of posterity.

We may easily believe, that by the means I have described the little Michel soon obtained a remarkable proficiency in the Latin language; nor need we be surprised that a modern pedant, the Abbé Mangin, forgetting all disadvantages in the consideration of one advantage, should have written a book, called "The Education of Montaigne, or Art of Teaching Latin according to the Method of Roman Mothers," in which he recommends the establishment of schools, whither infants, as soon as weaned, should be taken, to learn the spirit of the *as in præsenti*. Previously some solemn Professor had recommended to a mighty monarch—also, perhaps, on the hint of Montaigne—the founding of a city, isolated from the world, in which nothing but Latin should be spoken. The

learned Buchanan was more in accordance with the spirit of his age, however, when he promised Montaigne to recommend his father's system in a forthcoming Essay on Education.

It was not the fault of the system, but of its discontinuance, that Montaigne so easily forgot a language in which he became early so proficient. When he wrote his Essays he could still speak Latin, as could all men of letters in those days, but with difficulty; and had lost even the habit of writing it, in which he once was a complete master. Like his father he used, when young, to compose Latin verses, but noticed that he always imitated the last poet he had read, and so abandoned that exercise. By degrees he seems to have had no more ordinary command over Latin than if he had been merely grounded in it at school; and this, no doubt, would always be the result of any such experiment, unless sufficiently well carried out to leave a boy ignorant of his own language.

Montaigne states, however, that this early experience in a foreign language left ineffaceable, though deeply-buried, traces in his mind. We can always find the direction of last year's paths if we seek them under the winter's fall of leaves. If Michel's studies did not make him a more learned man than many educated with far less system, it connected some of his primary emotions so completely with Latin that its words sometimes came to his lips on occasions of sudden feeling before the corresponding French ones. Once especially, when his father, who appeared to be

in full health, fell, without warning, fainting against him, his first exclamation was in Latin. This insurrection of early habits against more recent ones is remarkable to observe, and may account for the reminiscences of a state seemingly former to this one, that sometimes float through the mind like light clouds that have gathered overhead, and have not been seen to come from the horizon.

Pierre Eyquem desired, also, that his son should learn Greek, against which there was an ecclesiastical prejudice at that time. The Church did not like comparisons to be made between the Vulgate and the Septuagint. However, although Pierre seems to have been religious even to superstition, he did not in this case submit to the dictation of the theologians. Francis the First had recently founded the College of France, and under the shadow, as it were, of the white beard of old Lascaris, Greek was for the first time publicly professed in Paris. The Court of Navarre was still more liberal, and, obeying these two influences, Pierre Eyquem set to work to teach the language of Plutarch to his son. As usual, his method was peculiar. Michel was made to study his declensions under the form of a game of his father's invention. He does not give the details, but compares the system to that according to which arithmetic and geometry were taught like a game of draughts. It is worth noting here that La Boëtie mentions the practice of luring children to learn to read by means of brightly-illuminated books.

An instance of the care and gentleness with which Montaigne was brought up is given by himself, where he says that in all his childhood he was only whipped twice, and that very mildly. He considered characteristically that he thus contracted a debt towards his own children, and he never allowed his daughter to be beaten at all.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BOY IS SENT TO COLLEGE.

THE eccentric lord of Montaigne was, perhaps fortunately, not suffered to carry out his original plan of education without opposition. The public opinion of his neighbourhood seems, indeed, to have declared against him. Possibly the difficulties of his undertaking increased as the boy grew. The family found the whole affair, no doubt, a bore. Besides, Mademoiselle Antoinette had been all this time rapidly adding to the worthy knight's family—boys and girls, who do not seem to have been made the subject of any educational experiment whatever. Two brothers, Thomas and Peter, and a sister Jane, were born before 1540. The attention of Pierre Eyquem was, no doubt, diverted by these new cares. At any rate, the "goodman," we are told, began to fear failure in a matter which he had so much at heart. What if instead of making his boy a sage he made him a dunce? All the world was ready unanimously to say, "We told you so." The boy himself seemed inclined to confirm all the

world's opinion by his heavy taciturn manner. Pierre took fright. He was no longer surrounded by the inexorable pedants who first suggested the new system to him. So he at length allowed himself to be carried away by common opinion, "which always follows the leader like storks," and sent Master Michel, aged about six years—that is, towards 1540—to the College of Guyenne, of new institution, but flourishing, and considered the best in France.

This college had been, since 1534, under the presidency of a learned Portuguese, André de Gouvea. The city of Bordeaux had invited him from Paris, to minister to an increased desire of study and knowledge which had manifested itself there, as in all parts of France. He was considered a man of great power; and, as a legist, has been placed by some above the celebrated Cujas. The College of Guyenne, which numbered as many as two thousand five hundred pupils, flourished under his auspices. Various learned professors, some of whom have left reputations that still endure, successively came to his assistance; as Nicolas Grouchy, who wrote *De Comitiis Romanorum*; Guillaume Guerente, who commented Aristotle with such success that students left Paris to follow his lessons; Mark Antony Muretus, the elegant poet and accomplished orator, who was once burnt in effigy at Toulouse as a Huguenot stained with nameless vices, and who is pilloried before posterity as the Catholic apologist of the Saint Bartholomew; and George Buchanan, who may have derived some of his

anti-monarchical theories from the same source at which La Boëtie, so much younger, about the same time was drinking so copiously, to find utterance so much earlier.

Montaigne, somewhat cavalierly, calls these four distinguished men his "domestic preceptors;" and elsewhere, his "chamber preceptors." Perhaps some of them were paid to act as his private tutors. As for Muret, I cannot find a place for him at all; and it is to be observed, that in the first edition of the Essays his name was not mentioned. He did not become a professor at Bordeaux until about 1547, when Montaigne had left college; but it is just possible that, before going to expound Terence and Cicero in 1544, at the age of eighteen, in the house of the Archbishop of Auch, he had been recommended to Pierre Eyquem as a precocious youth, and employed as a private tutor to watch over Michel out of school hours. It is curious to observe that Muret was a protégé of old Julius Scaliger, with whom Montaigne's father may have had relations of friendship that afterwards turned to hereditary hatred; and we must not forget, that at some time before 1549 he was one of the companions of Ronsard at the College of Coqueret in Paris.

Buchanan was a political refugee. After having acquired learning in the midst of poverty and difficulties of every kind, he had been patronised by James the Fifth of Scotland, and made preceptor of his natural son the Earl of Murray. In an evil hour, however, he allowed himself to be spirited on to a vigorous

onslaught against the monkish order, of which his royal master had reason to complain. The monks were lashed up to fury; and the king abandoned Buchanan, as it was natural to expect. He was imprisoned; but escaped, first to London, then to Paris, and finally to Bordeaux, where he found quiet and employment in the society of his staunch friend André Gouvea. He professed at the college for three years, and wrote two Latin tragedies for the use of the scholars, but in 1543 was frightened away by the plague. We shall find that he met Montaigne at a more advanced period of life, and complimented him on his extreme proficiency in Latin as a boy. Neither he nor the other masters dared accost Montaigne. They were sure of an answer more startling and idiomatic than they could ever compete with.

What a curious life was that of these professors or pedants of the sixteenth century, ever on the move, wandering from place to place, disseminating classical and philosophical knowledge as they went! If some of them suffered misery, and even died of hunger, utterly neglected, others earned marvellous reputations, such as learning will never probably command any more. Kings and courts vied for their possession. In 1547, John the Third of Portugal, desirous to found an university at Coimbra, summoned his subject Gouvea to preside over it; so that great teacher abandoned Bordeaux, taking along with him Guerente and Grouchy, and went to teach law in his native land. Presently afterwards, remembering again his old friend

Buchanan, he invited that restless genius to join him; and he did so. But no enemy of monkdom could dwell with impunity in Portugal. The fame of Buchanan's satire accompanied him, and the cowls began to wag with fury. Gouvea died, and the great Scotchman was glad to escape from the hands of his persecutors back to France.

Pierre Eyquem, at any rate at first, tried to carry out part of his peculiar views, even though he had sent Michel to a college; but though he was very particular in his choice of tutors, and in all circumstances connected with the boy's training—even endeavouring to obtain the modification of certain regulations in his favour—he could do very little. College, as Montaigne says, is always college. His Latin gradually deteriorated. Yet he admits that his unaccustomed proficiency in that language enabled him rapidly to reach the first classes, and to finish his education at thirteen.

It is quite unnecessary either to refute or to accept as strict matter of fact, what Montaigne tells us about the little profit he derived from his early education, or indeed about his own deficiencies generally. What great importance can we assign as a statement—whatever we may assign to it as a revelation of his habit of thought—to what he says to the effect that of all the sciences of which he had tasted the outer crust in childhood, nothing but a vague remembrance of their general character and tendency remained in his mind? It is at that age that the mould of our

after ideas is always formed. I think it evident that Montaigne's education at the College of Guyenne left a peculiarly profound impression on him. We may even infer this from his comical hatred of pedants. He felt, and could never shake off their influence.

In the sixteenth century the word University meant in France, as now in England, a local institution for the purpose of education in all its provinces. The College of Guyenne, to which Michel was sent, formed part of the University of Bordeaux. It should be observed, that all scholars throughout France were dressed in a black gown with a belt, and a round cap. The Regents wore square caps, and flowing robes with long rows of buttons. On entering a school it was the custom to pay in advance for what were called "letters of schooldom"—at the rate of about two sous a month. There were extras for benches, candles, and so forth. Books were bought, of course, by the parents: a dictionary in small folio cost twenty-five sous, a Cicero *De Amicitia* one sou; and other books sold at the same cheap rate.

The discipline attempted to be maintained in these schools was tolerably severe. Whenever a Regent passed, all the scholars were obliged to stop, uncover, and bow; and when he entered the class-room it was the custom to applaud, stamp with the feet, thump the desks with books, and cry *Vivat!* As now, lads frequently played practical jokes on their professors. Whilst Muretus was teaching, some wag once began ringing a bell: he looked up and said; "Amongst so many

beasts I should have been surprised not to find one sheep!" The bell was silenced. One of the scholars was chosen as Explorator, or overseer; and he was particularly ordered to report whoever spoke in French; for the scholastic language was Latin. A good deal of corporal punishment seems to have been inflicted in these colleges, which Montaigne calls "very gaols of captive youth." How vividly their horrors recurred to his imagination! "Draw near them in school-hours," he exclaims; "and what do you hear? Nothing but the screams of children tortured, or of masters drunk with their own rage!"—"It were better," says Rabelais, "to be a galley-slave in the hands of the Moors and Tartars, a murderer in prison, or even a dog, than a collegian."

"We used to be up at four o'clock in the morning," says Henri de Mesmes; "and having prayed to God, went at five o'clock to the school-room, our big books under our arms, our inkstands and candlesticks in our hands." In the short days they began study before light, and continued until after dark. We may be perfectly certain that Montaigne, accustomed by his father to be waked by the sound of music, did not relish this change of life, and I can find many traces of disgust in his writings. He learned rapidly, but without loving what he learned. The first time he really looked upon books with pleasure was when the Metamorphoses of Ovid fell into his hands. He was then only seven or eight years old, and he used to steal away from play to read those wonderful stories. We

must remember that Latin was, as it were, his mother tongue. The book was easy to him, and suited his childish taste. As for Launcelot du Lac, Amadis, and Huon de Bordeaux, and "such rubbish," with which boys were wont to amuse themselves, he was so well watched that he did not even know them by name. The tutor discovered Michel's taste for Ovid and poetry generally, and, instead of interfering, quietly winked at private readings, which seem to have been a breach of the regulations. In this way the boy ran through, after Ovid, the Æneid; then through Terence, then Plautus, and at last came to the Italian Comedies, always lured on by the pleasantness of the subject. "If any tutor," says Montaigne, "had been so absurd as to interfere with this course of reading, I fancy I should have brought back from college nothing but a hatred of books, as nearly all our nobility does." Instead of acting thus imprudently, the said tutor, whilst he pretended to see nothing, sharpened Michel's appetite for secret reading, by throwing some slight obstacles in his way, and keeping him gently to the regular course of study — gently; for the chief qualities which Pierre Eyquem sought in those to whose care he committed his son were "debonnairety and facility of complexion."

Montaigne not only witnessed the acting of plays at college by his fellow-pupils, but took a very brilliant part in this amusement himself. He had an assurance of countenance, he says, and a suppleness of voice and gesture, most remarkable. When he was scarcely

twelve years of age, as he quaintly lets us know by quoting a line from Virgil, he played the principal characters in the Latin tragedies of Buchanan, Guerente, and Muret, which were represented with great pomp at the College of Guyenne. André de Gouvea had a remarkable talent for directing such ceremonies, in which Michel was considered a "master-workman."

The origin of this custom of acting in the colleges does not seem to be known. Its introduction has been made an accusation against the Jesuits, but it existed before their time. In the year of Montaigne's birth, Marguerite, sister of Francis the First—his Mignonne, as he called her—was introduced by the students, under the incitement of their masters, on the theatre of the College of Navarre at Paris, in the character of a Fury, with torch in hand, because she resisted persecution against the Calvinists. The king, irritated at the attack on his then too-beloved sister, sent his archers to arrest the professors; but the latter roused their scholars, who, furious, bigoted, and dirty, collected in immense throngs in the narrow passages that led to the college, and repulsed the royal agents with stones and other weapons. Nearly all through the sixteenth century we find the students acting as the army of fanaticism. What a change has now come over this corporation! The Parisian student may still be inclined to resist authority, but how far is he now from being made the instrument of religious bigotry! It is very curious that this insult to power, supported by means so audacious, should have been com-

pletely successful. There were about forty thousand students of the Four Nations at Paris in those days; and shortly afterwards Garnier, in his commentary on Ronsard, talks, rather at random, of a hundred thousand.

The custom of allowing the students to act plays in their colleges continued throughout the greater part of the sixteenth century. The representations were much frequented by the nobility, the clergy, and the magistracy; but in 1579 the ordonnance of Blois forbade all kinds of comedies or dramatic pieces to be performed in colleges. I have no doubt that it is to this that Montaigne, writing a little afterwards, alludes, when he says, "I do not blame this practice in young children of family, and I have seen our princes since that time [that is, when he was at college] follow it in person, after the example of some of the ancients, in a decent and praiseworthy manner. The actor's art was not considered shameful in Greece; and I have always accused those persons of impertinence who condemn this sort of amusement, and of injustice those who envy the people such pleasures, and forbid the entrance of our cities to good comedians." He then goes on to defend public amusements generally, as likely to divert people from bad and secret actions. "Why should not men collect together to amuse themselves, just as they collect together to worship?" Why not, indeed!

Montaigne, as we see from all this, not only went through the ordinary routine studies of his time, and

with great honour, but being naturally of a sedate and retired disposition, spent his leisure hours in reading, and so rapidly improved his mind that, as we have seen, his school education was considered complete at the age of thirteen. We must not, however, regard this as a very remarkable instance of precocity. Many biographies of men of the sixteenth century begin with statements still more extraordinary. Agrippa d'Aubigné claims to have read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, when he was six years of age, and says he translated the Crito of Plato at seven and a half! But as we shall see, in those days of strife, political and religious parties, besides contending in arms, sought to outvie each other, not only in talent and reputation for virtue, but in the number of infant prodigies they could produce. If Agrippa could be believed, Bongars and La Boëtie would be thrown into the shade; and there can be little doubt that this was the intention of his fable.

## CHAPTER VII.

### STUDENT-LIFE OF MONTAIGNE.

PIERRE EYQUEM, we must remember, was not only lord of Montaigne, but citizen of Bordeaux. He spent a great part of his time in that city, and early aspired to and attained civic honours there. In 1530 he was elected Jurat and Prévôt, and in 1536 Deputy Mayor. In 1540, Pierre Eyquem, described as Ecuyer and Seigneur de Montaigne, was again elected Jurat. In short, all through the period corresponding with the education of Michel, his father was a remarkably important man in the capital of the province of Guyenne. There is nothing surprising, therefore, in the fact that, his first and second born, if both were alive at the time, being destined to live like fighting-gentlemen, he should determine to make a magistrate of Michel.

We have, in reality, no direct information at all as to where Montaigne studied after leaving college, about 1546. "Whilst I was a child (or very young) I was plunged over head and ears in law," is almost

all he says himself; and we are left to conjecture, not only the place or places in which he passed his early youth, but nearly all the incidents that attended it. Similar uncertainty prevails as to the early lives of many others of the civil heroes of the sixteenth century. We know, for example, that Bodin, born in 1530, studied law at Toulouse; but this is almost the only fact ascertained of that sagacious writer's youthful life. As for Montaigne, we are told by flippant biographers that he studied at some "school of law." We may be sure of that, since he became a lawyer. A recent conscientious critic, M. Grün, ingeniously argues that he must have been sent to Toulouse. He infers this, from the neighbourhood and celebrity of that school where Cujas professed in 1547; and from the fact that four or five persons, who were afterwards Montaigne's friends, were educated for the law at that place. But Cujas could not have been the attraction, as he supposes. That legist was born in 1526, and was, therefore, but a young professor when Montaigne began studying law. He did not become very celebrated until twenty years afterwards. However, it is true that he was even then admitted to give great promise; and Estienne Pasquier, who was present at his first lecture at Toulouse, mentions the general favourable impression.

The same kind of argument, moreover, that enables an ingenious pleader to suggest so strongly that Montaigne studied at Toulouse — as, for example, that he was a friend of Henri de Mesmes, who certainly did

study there — would enable me to show the great probability that he was sent to Paris. One of his most intimate friends, Guy du Faur de Pibrac, born in 1528, went, at the age of fourteen, to Paris, though a native of Toulouse itself, and studied law also under Cujas, then quite a stripling; and belles-lettres and philosophy under Pierre Bunel, the man who spoke and wrote Latin the best of all his time. The supposition would be corroborated by the fact, that the said Pierre Bunel, also of Toulouse, was a friend of Pierre Eyquem, used to visit him at his château, and would, no doubt, dilate on the superiority of the University of Paris.

As, however, there was a university at Bordeaux itself, it is probable that Montaigne studied chiefly there. But my impression is, that Pierre Eyquem took him first to one place and then to another, giving him the opportunity of hearing a variety of teachers. This was the custom of the day. Students attended one course of lectures in one city, and then hastened to another. Pasquier had listened to Balduin and Hottoman at Paris for a year before he went to study under Cujas at Toulouse. This method was supposed to be the best.

M. Grün, then, is not deserving of grave rebuke for maintaining the probability of Montaigne's having studied at Toulouse. The future philosopher was there during his adolescence, as we learn from the story he tells of his meeting with Simon Thomas, "a great physician in his day." Montaigne happened

to be in the house of a rich consumptive old man at Toulouse when Simon came in to give his professional advice. They talked of the means of cure. Among other observations the doctor made was this, that it would be wise in the sick old man to make his house attractive to young Montaigne: "fix your eyes often on the freshness of his face," said he, "and your thoughts on the joy and vigour that overflow on every side from his adolescence. Fill all your senses with this youth's flourishing state, and your health may amend." "He forgot," adds Montaigne, "to say that mine might be destroyed."

The French student in the sixteenth century enjoyed many privileges. When he arrived in a city where he intended to study, and went in search of lodgings, nobody could refuse to receive him, and he could sometimes force a landlord to expel an old lodger to make room for him. If too high rent was demanded, an appeal was made to magistrates appointed by the University, who fixed a reasonable price. We may easily imagine, then, that a landlord had not an arbitrary right of giving warning. On the contrary, if the noise of a blacksmith's hammer or of a turner's wheel incommoded the student, he could get his neighbours sent away; and even any one who sang too loudly could be forced to move. Books could never be seized for rent or for any other debt, nor received in payment of dinner by any eating-house, nor pawned. Students were allowed to wear short vests of any colour they pleased, and could carry arms in travelling. They

were exempt from mounting guard at the gates of the city, even in time of war or plague. Neither scholars nor professors could be excommunicated without express permission of the Pope. It is easy to conceive that these privileges and immunities may have contributed to nourish a sense of dignity in some, whilst they encouraged others to license. Villon has been a student from all time in Paris. The disciples of the Muses or of Themis, of Plato or Aristotle, often went out to read in the streets, in order to attract the eyes of ladies from their windows; and were blamed for light talk, but especially for dirt and gluttony. Formerly, says a *Laudator temporis acti*, contemporary with Pierre Eyquem, students used only to eat three times in two days—now they eat three times an hour! Their life was adventurous, ending not unfrequently in prison, sometimes on the gibbet. As might have been expected, among the best minds the spirit of opposition and free examination arose; and the students were generally celebrated as frondeurs and mockers. In the sixteenth century, however, most of the universities seem to have rallied to Catholicism under the influence of their professors, and frequently furnished an army to bigotry. Under such auspices did Montaigne study the law.

The Parliament of Bordeaux was one of the most celebrated of the eight parliaments which, at that time, existed in France. I cannot here undertake to describe the organisation of these bodies, or the extent of their jurisdiction, but it is necessary to say that they exercised

a very varied authority, and that their members were, in the strictest sense of the word, magistrates. To our parliaments they had scarcely any resemblance but in name. Their seats were filled by the king; and were procurable sometimes by favour, sometimes by purchase. They had nothing to do with the making of laws, but their duty was to administer them. In their court, however, it was necessary for royal edicts to be registered before they could be enforced; and they were thus enabled sometimes to exercise a power of veto. But in all important cases almost, a Bed of Justice was held and registration was enforced. It was with a view of his becoming a member of this corporation, and wearing the red robe of Conseiller, that Pierre Eyquem directed the studies of his son.

In spite of the appointment, towards the end of the fifteenth century, of the Grand Council destined to curb the Parliaments, those bodies had retained nearly all their influence, and were considered, at the time when Michel aspired to belong to them, the most august in the kingdom. Afterwards prostituting their power to the service of fanaticism — with vain occasional attempts to favour toleration when they saw their authority diminish — they gradually declined, and never recovered respect. Beneath them swarmed an immense number of courts and magistrates, with intricate jurisdictions and duties which modern men shrink from describing or understanding. There they were in their black silk robes, or their robes of black wool — some exercising power over provinces, some going from

village to village, even from field to field, setting up their benches under the first tree—they were called *Juges de l'Orme*—and deciding the causes submitted to them. Never, perhaps, was there such a deluge of lawyers and judges as in the sixteenth century. Their profession was almost the only one of any dignity to which the rising middle classes could devote themselves. As we have seen, even gentlemen began to leave the profession of arms for this more tranquil and respectable one.

We have no reason, however, to believe that Michel de Montaigne ever attained any great proficiency as a legal student. All we can be sure of is the fact that he did study. In a subsequent page I shall bring together the proofs which convince me that his early experiences were much more varied and extensive than seem generally supposed. But I may mention here, not to give the subject too much importance, that partly, perhaps, from the absence of direct details on Montaigne's legal education, the writers of the seventeenth century took it into their heads that our gentleman philosopher was so ashamed of his profession as to avoid speaking of it. Balzac, eagerly quoted by the writers of Port Royal—to whom the Essayist was especially distasteful—pleasantly suggests the accusation without insisting on it. He regrets, however, that Montaigne had not been more communicative; "for he could have told us plenty of amusing things about the doings at the Palais de Justice, the humours of the judges, the misery of the pleaders, the artifices

and stratagems of *La Chicane.*" "No," replies a solemn biographer; "the man of genius would not have fulfilled the expectation of the man of wit. He would not have made fun of the lawyers!"

The fact is that Montaigne, if his apologists will allow me to say so, without endeavouring to conceal the notorious fact that he belonged to the magistracy—he constantly alludes to his profession as if everybody knew of it—*does* affect a sort of disdainful tone in speaking on the subject. Since he put on the sword he regretted that he had ever worn the robe. No one was ever more anxious to impress the fact that he was a gentleman author. Buffon wrote in ruffles; Montaigne always had the escutcheon of his family before him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE REBELLION OF 1548.

MONTAIGNE was in some sort the Epitome of his Age; and, though he shrank from writing history, there is scarcely a single public event of that time an appreciation of which does not lurk in some corner of the Essays. He is often thinking of Frenchmen and Italians when his pen seems to deal with Phrygians, Romans, and Greeks. Every page we read of the annals and literature of the sixteenth century enables us to understand him better. There is a constant temptation, therefore, in writing his Life, to turn aside and paint the scenes amidst which he moved—scenes that gave a colour to his mind and a tone to his speculations.

But general and particular histories have sufficiently enlarged on the social aspects of France at that period. The country, like the rest of Europe, was feeling the throes of the new form of Christianity now known under the name of Protestantism. Calvin began to preach about the year of Montaigne's birth; but by this time had retired to Geneva, and was laying the

foundations of his theocratic government. He had sown the seeds of Reform in many provinces of France, especially in Saintonge, whence we shall now see his doctrines come out armed, to influence the destiny of Montaigne and his dearest friend. The Huguenot party was not yet, however, constituted. It takes much persecution to change Saints and conscientious Christians into Rebels and Heroes. No doubt their doctrines were opposed to what was called lawful authority at that period; but opposed only as purity must ever be opposed to vice and corruption. It is a mistake to imagine that Puritanism is necessarily anti-monarchical, unless we take Monarchy to mean, which I always do take it to mean in these pages, the absolute authority of one man brought to bear on the lives and fortunes of a people, without even the supposed check of laws, as in Ideal Despotism, or in defiance of law, as it was almost always in France in the sixteenth century. Kings with the blood of the Guises in their veins perished in the attempt to introduce the same practice into our island: for here Puritanism was victorious; there, though it struggled nobly, it fell. The contest essentially was between virtue and vice—between men who believed that we had, in truth, something supernatural and divine in us, and men who recognised little more than our most beastly instincts. The latter were in power; the former, if they could grow strong enough, would naturally aim at power. Any one, accordingly, who led a particularly pious and exemplary life, was straightway believed to harbour

revolutionary intentions. Long before the Reformers had allowed the word Republic to enter into their minds—when they were a humble, manageable, loyal body, asking only permission to preach and to pray, not in public, or even in quiet, but without being dragooned and burned—Francis the First and other great pillars of order denounced them as subverters of authority and civil society. This was the perpetual accusation against "the new religion," by which Catholic princes excused themselves, often with success, to Protestant princes for their cruelties and persecutions. The Guises professed always to act in the interest of Order rather than of the Church.

Religious persecution soon became a habit, and burning heretics almost a public amusement. But the people in various provinces were beginning at last to show signs of bitterness and independence. Political reasons assisted in producing disaffection. Arbitrary and extreme taxes spread ruin on every side. Just as Michel was concluding his college education, in 1545, the Vaudois were being massacred in the east of France by order of the reckless and sanguinary king, to please his bigoted and sanguinary parliaments; and, in the very province of Perigord, insurrections of the peasantry, incited partly by social causes, partly, no doubt, by the indignation of persecuted faith, were taking place. In 1546, as we find related in the Life of Palissy the Potter, persecution of the Saints waxed hot in Saintonge; and was not submitted to with anything like humility. Everything seemed to give

warning of an approaching tempest. The moral atmosphere was dark and lowering. On all sides timid or conscientious people were flying the country. Geneva was becoming as it were the external capital of French Protestantism.

The last years of the reign of Francis the First exhibit that monarch in a condition so abject that we can scarcely repress a sentiment of pity. The "old gallant," as his discarded mistress, who had taken up with his son, called him, was no longer fit for government or debauchery. Body and mind had equally been destroyed in those wretched resorts to which the monarch, led by his innate tastes and his morbid imagination, fired by the revelations of his favourite writer Aretino, went to escape from the comparative refinement and decency of his court. His sister was far removed from him in a matrimonial banishment at Nérac. Catherine de Medici already disfigured his court. The Guises were rising, and had made their characteristic *début* by murdering the king's younger son in the midst of a snowball romp. "There comes the vanguard of my happiness," cried Henry, as his brother's coffin passed by; alluding to the near death of his father. Diana laughed at and encouraged this ferocious pleasantry.

Henry the Second succeeded Francis in 1547; just as Michel de Montaigne left college and began studying for the law. The repulsive scenes that ushered in his reign, and the fact that Catherine de Medici was queen under the haughty sufferance of Diana of

Poitiers, are but too well known; and as we have no good ground for supposing that Pierre Eyquem took his son to Paris immediately, unless he went as a matter of form, with all the other nobility and gentry, to do homage to the new monarch, and witness the famous Coup de Jarnac, we need not at present turn our attention to the Court. In 1548 we find Montaigne, a lad of from fifteen to sixteen, living at Bordeaux, during a terrible insurrection which took place there. That insurrection was one of the most important events that had occurred since the time of the Jaquerie, and in many respects seems to have been similar in character. Montaigne himself describes vividly only a single scene. Ordinary history gives an outline of the whole, but rather as an episode than as a step in the political progress of the country. Nowhere do we find any attempt to discover the true character, or trace the deep sources of the movement. I must, therefore, as far as my space will allow, construct a narrative of those terrible scenes, so well fitted to strike the imagination of a lad of sixteen. The young Montaigne, not much capable of enthusiasm, seems to have escaped from the revolutionary contagion. At any rate, the chief influence on his mind of this sedition was, doubtless, when the first fervour had passed away, to make him mistrustful of extreme principles, and disposed to take shelter under the wing of authority. But this was a lesson which all the events of that time taught one of his calm and timid disposition; and I should not think it necessary to

enlarge on the obscure history of this revolution if we had not been informed by De Thou of the mighty influence it exerted on the mind of young Estienne de la Boëtie, at that time eighteen years of age, and probably a student at the University of Bordeaux.

M. Henri Martin, in his admirable history, gives a picturesque, though brief, narrative of what took place, but does not attempt to connect the insurrection with the great movement of religious and political ideas that was going on; omits to mention some of the most important leaders and most characteristic incidents; and, indeed, taking his tone from contemporary memoir-writers—soldiers who could not understand, and middle-class royalists who would not—represents the whole affair as little better than a huge riot. De Thou and the Memoirs of Vieilleville furnish him with his chief materials: he does not quote the graphic description of Montaigne, that gives so different a colour to a well-known incident, and does not appear to have consulted the Memoirs of the Duke of Guise, the letter of the Cardinal of Vendome, or the extraordinary "Pasquille," or Satire, in which a dramatic account of the whole of what took place at Bordeaux is given by a very curious process. All the personages who played a part, from the "Coward King" to the "little children," are brought upon the scene, and represented as speaking in Latin phrases from the Scriptures. I shall make a sober use of this document, but should have regretted to miss some of the hints it contains.

The movement *did* begin with all the outward character of a mere insurrection of misery against the monopoly of salt. For a long time, as I have said, the Province of Guyenne had been undisturbed, but men's minds were deeply moved by religious discussions. The internal sedition was carried on in peace and quietness, as it always would be if there were no attempt at compression. Henry the Second, by a violent edict, insisting on the levying of the gabelle against the privileges of the province, provoked discontent in all classes, and amongst all sects. When the first rising against the Gabelleurs took place at Jorignac in the Angoumois, on the 1st of May, it was led by a priest. The example was speedily followed, and the whole country soon swarmed with insurgents. Every village, hamlet, farm-house, supplied its contingent. Men came out of the forests to join the insurrection. The anger of the people seems to have been unanimous.

But it was in Saintonge, the stronghold of the Reformed doctrine, that the first attempt at organisation was made. Fifty thousand men collected on some plain, and elected as their Grand Corrounal, or Colonel, the Sieur de Puymoreau, one of the principal gentlemen of the country, with four deputy-corrounals to aid and advise him, named Bouillon, Galafre, Cramaillon, and Chateauroux. Puymoreau did the work he had to do, and died amidst calumny and outrage; but he was probably a man of large views and firm character, fit to be understood by La Boëtie, and his friend

Longa. None of the cruelties committed on the agents of royal exaction are attributed to him. Once, however, when marching through the country, he came to a village where a poor man threw himself on his knees, and complained that the curé had just stolen his mare by violence, and could not be made to give it up. The Grand Corrounal instantly ordered restitution, had the priest tied to a tree and whipped, and proceeded on his way. Every man who passed the tree struck the wretched culprit till he died. Puymoreau carefully avoided pillaging the castles of nobles who remained neutral, but used terrible severity against one who took an insurgent and put him to death. Terror kept the great lords quiet. Orders were issued "in the name of the Grand Corrounal of Saintonge," to all curés, vicars, and ecclesiastics, to ring the bells of the churches, to call the people together; "which order was more exactly obeyed than if issued by the king." For a whole month Puymoreau and his colleagues were absolute in Saintonge. They took all the chief towns, beat the King of Navarre's cavalry, liberated prisoners, punished exaction, pillaged some places, but in general endeavoured to maintain order. Their objects, and those of their followers, are not clearly known. They seem, however, to have been a sort of fanatical republicans, or Fifth Monarchy men. Their favourite Scripture quotation — as it was of our Puritans, who came of the same stock — appears to have been, "Put not your trust in princes."

Whilst Puymoreau was thus establishing his autho-

rity, and those of his sect or party, in Saintonge, another chief, named Talemagne—the same who beat the men of the King of Navarre—marched from the centre of the insurrection towards Bordeaux. But meanwhile meetings of the peasantry had been called, and revolutionary circulars were issued. "The contagion spread like a stain of oil." Talemagne found everything ready, and after making an attempt on the castle of Blaye, boldly turned his attention towards Bordeaux. He took possession of Libourne, and then wrote to the Jurats to come and wait on him. They did so; and he was enabled to ascertain that two at least of their number were favourable to his cause, besides other persons "of consequence and credit." Whilst negociations were going forward, emissaries from the insurgent camp introduced themselves into the city, and incited the discontented masses to rise. The "new doctrine" had many disciples in Bordeaux, and they now began to speak out and attract the multitude. The great dispute afterwards was as to who first rang the tocsin, and, of course, the magistrate tried to throw the whole blame on the fanatical strangers from Saintonge. As soon as the movement had declared itself on the 28th of May, they sent, or claim to have sent—for it is not clear that at the outset they were not accomplices—in all haste for Tristan de Moneins, appointed the previous year lieutenant of Henri d'Albret, king of Navarre, in Guyenne. This person seems to have been of a humane and conciliating disposition. He was not far off, and made all

haste to reach Bordeaux. When he drew near, the great bell of the Hôtel de Ville was ringing the tocsin, and presently afterwards the bells of the parishes of St. Michel and Ste. Eulalie were heard in full swing. A roar of voices filled the street, and the people were all running like madmen in one direction. A public meeting of citizens was convoked in the Hôtel de Ville; and some of "the people, to prevent discontent," were admitted. Thousands of armed insurgents stationed outside. Moneins spoke fair, but slightly blaming the audacity of those who had excited the troubles in Guyenne. Whereupon a man named Guillotin—how strange to find this name in connexion with the revolution in the sixteenth century!—boldly said that the neighbouring towns had done well, and rendered a valuable service to the public by their insurrection. He even went on to appeal to the patriotism of the good people of Bordeaux—incited them to imitate the glorious example set them, "without fearing the most frightful punishments"—and recommended them to "recover the liberties of their ancestors." Where did this man come from? Was he related to the Alexandre Guillotin, Docteur en Droit of the Comté Venaisin, the chief of the Protestant insurrection in that district in 1560? What was his aim? What were these liberties intended to be "recovered?" What means were at his disposal? We have little materials even for guessing; but it is singular that this movement, which is treated by all historians as a mere food-riot, should have so stirred

the minds of the men of that generation that its doctrines and its aspirations should have been incorporated in by far the most eloquent and impassioned attack upon monarchy ever written—the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude, by Estienne La Boëtie.

Guillotin's language was so violent that Moneins was offended; but he afterwards apologised, and the night passed in comparative tranquillity. The king's lieutenant, however, retired to the Château Trompette, into which, together with the Château Haz, he caused all the provisions and stores to be removed. This exasperated the people more and more. They seized the Arsenal, distributed the arms, got out cannon to breach the castles, and rang the tocsin; which, says the historian, "has a wonderful effect in exciting the people at such times."

The populace of Bordeaux seemed about to anticipate the taking of the Bastille. It is singular how many expressions in the contemporary narratives of these events remind one of 1789. The insurgents from the various surrounding towns were coming in in bodies. At the most critical moment "the people of Saintes" arrived. Does this refer to the arrival of Talemagne; or are we to understand that Puymoreau had marched to Bordeaux with the main body of the insurrectionary army? His name does not recur until we hear it again on the scaffold. However this may be, from that time forward the reaction seems to have commenced by the retirement of the chief among the bourgeoisie from the popular cause. The Catholic and

Republican middle classes may have been alarmed by the Protestant and levelling doctrines of the peasantry. The Parliament, seeing the danger of Moneins, interposed with its good offices, and deputed the President De la Chassagne to speak to the malcontents. He represented the danger they ran of royal vengeance, and made the usual promises of clemency. Some one cried out that all would be over if Moneins came forth from the castle. Whereupon La Chassagne went and persuaded him to condescend to the wishes of the people. The unfortunate man seems to have been afraid from the beginning of what occurred. Montaigne, who was present throughout all these events, adds many details, from personal experience, to the ordinary narratives. He says, speaking no doubt of what he saw from the balcony of some house, that Moneins came out of the castle in order to appease the tumult, and thus put himself in the power of the mutinous mob. The effect did not answer his expectations. His memory was commonly reproached, says the Essayist, with imprudence; but in reality his fault was not overboldness but want of firmness. He was too submissive and gentle. Instead of guiding the storm, he tried to pacify by humility. His mistake was committed, not when he threw himself unarmed in his *pourpoint* amidst the tempestuous waves of that popular sea, but when he showed that he repented what he had done. It was in the Hôtel de Ville. The crowd was shouting and pressing towards him. Misgivings seized him when he saw the danger close

at hand; his nose bled; his countenance, which was at first only flattering and fawning, became expressive of terror; his voice and his eyes were full of alarm and repentance: he tried to go to cover like a rabbit, and dodged to escape. Thus it was that he inflamed the people and drew them on him. Montaigne's sympathies were evidently on the other side, and he takes a sort of malicious pleasure in describing the undignified terror of a man whom his party had exalted into a hero. De Thou suppresses all the humiliating details, and says only that Moneins, seeing that the people were fighting who should get at him, in order to cover his retreat threw amongst them a handsome gold chain; thinking, no doubt, with aristocratic contempt of human nature, that all they meant was pillage. But one of them caught him a blow on the left cheek; whereupon the historian, ashamed of the truth, makes him draw to defend himself. He was killed, at any rate, and his body was exposed to insult during two days.

When the President La Chassagne, who had pledged his word to Moneins, saw the tragic termination of the attempt to pacify the insurgents, he took refuge in the convent of the Dominicans; but they went and carried him away from the altar, and forced him to become their leader. De Thou obtained the chief part of his information on the history of Guyenne from Montaigne, who, no doubt, attenuated as much as possible the part played by a relative of his father-in-law. The "Pasquille" I have mentioned, which is exact in all facts it states in common with other narratives, introduces La Chas-

sagne afterwards appearing for judgment before the victorious Connétable, sent by the king to put down the insurrection, and saying, "*Ave, Rabi.*" The Connétable answers: "*Ergo rex es tu?*" La Chassagne: "*Tu dicis.*" The Provost of the Marshal interposes: "Dost thou not hear what is said to thee?" La Chassagne answered not a word. Then the Provost repeated: "Dost thou answer nothing?" La Chassagne said: "Thou hast no power whatever over me." This parody of Scripture, which was not thought irreverent at that time, expresses clearly that La Chassagne was the chief of a defeated insurrection. The story of the flight to the convent was, perhaps, invented afterwards. At any rate, apparently under the guidance of La Chassagne, the people went and pillaged the houses of the officers of the Gabelle. Andrault the *récéveur* was caught, and horribly maltreated till he died. Popular vengeance went, it appears, to extreme excesses. Terror filled the city. One St. Simon, a Conseiller of the Parliament, assembled his family to address them on the subject of the public calamities, and suddenly hearing a great shout under his window fell down dead at the beginning of his discourse. The night passed thus. Next day the President began to obtain the upper hand, and cleverly incited the insurgents to massacre one another. Within four days the disturbances, having, on account of the divisions and misunderstandings of the leaders and the people, no longer any definite object, stopped of themselves.

The news came, too, that the Connétable de Mont-

morency, a near relation of Moneins, had been sent by the king (Henry the Second, then at Turin) on the first report of the insurrection in Guyenne, and was advancing rapidly with his army from Toulouse. There was no prospect of efficient assistance from any quarter. In spite of the solicitations of De Biren, ambassador of the Emperor at London, England was not inclined to take this opportunity of recovering her province of Guyenne. Everybody was ashamed or alarmed. We must not, I repeat, pay attention to the ordinary historians, who represent the whole affair as a rising of the lower classes, spurred by misery or avarice and headed by a few disreputable gentlemen, and who maintain that all presidents and important people who interfered were, forsooth, forced by the mob. It is evident that the movement was almost a unanimous one at first. All classes joinedin it. In the memoirs of François de Guise it is distinctly stated, that the Bordeaux insurrection was headed by Lavergne—a merchant, says De Thou—Macquenan, and Lestonnac, who was at any rate a gentleman, at that time Jurat. The family of the last-mentioned was afterwards related to Montaigne; for Jane his sister, whose birth I have mentioned, married a Lestonnac.

De Thou informs us, that when the people first expressed their indignation against Moneins, they wished Fréderic de Foix Candale, a great lord of Guyenne, whose family once possessed the whole of Medoc, to be put in his stead. But the historian, who was a friend of the Foix family, does not allow us

to suppose that this M. de Candale was in any way ambitious, or implicated in the movement. From the "Pasquille," however, we find that he was included in the accusations. It represents him, indeed, as ready "to die and suffer the cross" with the people of Bordeaux, before the arrival of the Connétable; and as afterwards imploring mercy for himself or for them. It seems certain that he had much to do with pacifying the city; but this does not prove that at the outset he did not encourage the insurrection. When failure came, the powerful made arrangements to escape, and their friends ever afterwards tried to misrepresent the affair. All this might indeed be inferred from the conduct of the brutal Montmorency. The Parliament of Bordeaux had already begun to curry favour by cruelty. They had sentenced a townsman, who first rang the tocsin, to be drawn by four horses; and now despatched a boat, fitted up magnificently with glass chambers, painted with gold and azure, and speckled with the arms of the terrible Connétable, to meet him. They expected, by sacrificing a few nobodies, to be received again as loyal subjects. But Montmorency replied to their compliments that he would not use their boat, nor, for that matter, the gates of their city. He had twenty-four good keys of his own,—pieces of artillery. With this message he dismissed the emissaries, and the city remained for a week in expectation of being utterly given up to pillage. When the army arrived, though welcoming flags were hoisted on every pinnacle and flaunted hypocritically from every window, a breach

was indeed made, out of mere insolence, and the punishment of revolt at once began. There can be no doubt that the Connétable was partly actuated by fury for the death of his relative Moneins; but he must also have received some private order from the king. The "souldars" and the "lansquenets" are represented as full of joy at the easy task confided to them; and applauded loudly at the "Confundanter omnes" of the Connétable, whom "the people of Medoc" call, in the "Pasquille," a "Samaritan possessed by the devil!"

That was a dreadful time, which may well have produced a lasting impression on the young and virtuous La Boëtie, and given him food for indignant denunciation of monarchy. Above a hundred and forty persons "of mark" were hung, beheaded, broken on the wheel, impaled, torn by four horses, or burned. Three were pounded until they were half dead, and then cast into the flames. Guillotin was one of those who suffered death by fire. The "Pasquille," which calls him Carlotain by mistake, implies that he met his death with courage, and in an enthusiastic manner: "Fear not them who kill the body, for they cannot kill the soul." Lavergne was drawn by horses. Galafre and Talemagne were broken alive. Lestonnac, Chevalier du Guet, Jurat, and Du Sault his brother, governor of the Château du Haz, had their heads cut off. Lestonnac had a beautiful wife, who went to beg her husband's life of Montmorency. He promised it on one infamous condition. The poor woman complied, and he then

took her to a window just as her husband's head was falling.

As almost the whole of the "Pasquille" I have so often quoted is made up of quotations from Scripture, it is necessary not to strain the interpretation too far in a religious sense; but it is worth noticing that the sentiments put in the mouths of all the sufferers express gentleness, resignation, piety. M. de Lestonnac says, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; have patience with me and I will *restore* all to thee:" which may imply that he wished to save his life; and the Capitaine du Sault protests his innocence. But M. de Pommiers, M. de Bales, M. de Ciret, M. de Moneins, Conseiller in the Parliament of Bordeaux, M. de Gans, Conseiller in Guyenne, and M. Jehannot le Sec, who were all probably condemned to the galleys, speak with Christian resignation; and Guillotin, as we have seen, assumes the attitude of a martyr.

The President La Chassagne, though violently accused,—*Si hunc dimittis non es amicus Cesaris*—contrived to escape positive punishment, but remained long in disgrace. He was acquitted, too, when, three years after, Dame de Lomagne, widow of Moneins, prosecuted him for the murder of her husband before the Parliament of Toulouse. The city itself was impeached, tried, and condemned. Even the bells that had served as a signal of revolt were punished by being destroyed. Not a bell, and indeed not a clock, was left entire in Bordeaux or its neighbourhood. This

indicates that not only the people but some of the clergy were engaged in the revolt. A hundred youths were publicly whipped, moreover; and the inhabitants of the city were compelled to do penance for the death of M. de Moneins, by scratching up his body with their nails from the hole in which it had been buried, and preparing a magnificent funeral. It took place at night. The Jurats and one hundred and twenty bourgeois, in mourning, first followed the bier, each with a torch in hand; and then came more than five thousand people of all estates—also with torches. When they arrived in front of the Connétable's house, in the street of the Red Hat, they were compelled to prostrate themselves and cry mercy. Then the Jurats produced the titles and privileges of the city, and burned them in a fire lighted by their own hands. Heavy pecuniary fines were, of course, not forgotten.

But we have still more intimate details of the events that accompanied the suppression and punishment of this terrible insurrection—details that place in a far clearer light the connivance of the upper and middle classes. Monsieur de Vieilleville marched from Poitiers to effect a junction with the Connétable. Being of a very humane disposition he forbade his troops to rob and plunder on the way, and actually paid for what he consumed. Thus he reached, at last, a large village, about three leagues from Bordeaux, and halted there. His grooms happened to discover, concealed under a heap of straw and hay, a quantity of old arms; as two hundred pikes of Biscay wood, eighty

arquebuses, sixty morions, engraved without gilding, and so forth. This looked very suspicious. Mine host was probably a leader of the insurrection. But Vieilleville, instead of sending him at once to punishment, spoke kindly to him, and allowed himself to be persuaded of his innocence. It appears that the man had a good reputation, and was really on excellent terms with the rebels, for various gentlemen of the neighbourhood had sent as many as thirty-five chests and coffers, by night, filled with valuable property, which they committed to his care, and which he caused to be walled up in a secret cellar. The moral of the story seems to be, that Vieilleville was a man of marvellous probity, and very different from the other officers of the army, for he neither delivered up the host to the prévôts to be judged nor robbed the property.

The said host was mayor of his village and well to do in the world, and so glad to escape scot-free that he would have adored M. de Vieilleville, if the latter would have allowed him. He had reason to be grateful, for all around the lansquenets and souldars were murdering and plundering. Everybody they wished to annoy was accused of having rung the tocsin. The host did his best to cover his friends and relations; but he lost all sympathy with his colleagues in rebellion, and often went afterwards, perhaps rather to prove his loyalty than for the mere sake of enjoyment, to witness the executions at Bordeaux, never omitting to take fruit and other presents to his preserver by the same opportunity.

Vieilleville went afterwards to garrison a village about a league from Bordeaux. The principal person of the place seems to have been a M. de Valvyn, Conseiller of the Parliament, who received the officer with profuse hospitality, and at once begged his protection. This person, too, appears to have dabbled in the insurrection, for he was profuse in his professions of innocence. Mademoiselle de Valvyn, his wife—such was the old style in speaking of married bourgeois ladies—in company with her daughters, of excellent beauty, also implored the protection of the humane soldier. She was quite wild with fear. The preceding night the house of her sister, a widow, who had likewise two very handsome daughters, had been attacked, and the whole family had fled to her for refuge. She fell on her knees. M. de Vieilleville replied that he too had daughters, and would be her guard. He was thanked with many tears; and it then came out that the pretence of her having given encouragement to the rebels was a mere cover to the designs of a young rake of the neighbourhood, who wished to break into her niece's room. M. de Valvyn had reason to thank the benevolence of Vieilleville. When the other Parliament men were compelled to do penance, his neighbours collected round his house to force him and all the ladies to go likewise; which looks as if the peasantry of the neighbourhood of Bordeaux regarded the insurrection as a mere bourgeois movement. They fetched the archers to assist them; cudgels were brought into play; and both archers and the

populace were compelled to retreat. M. de Vieilleville afterwards used his influence effectually to protect his host.

The gendarmes and archers from all the villages around used to obtain holidays by turns to go into Bordeaux, in order to enjoy the sight of the executions. Some of them came back with an idea that they thought might prove profitable. They went to the curé, and said that two victims, before dying, had accused him of having rung the tocsin, and threatened arrest if he did not at once pay them money. "The poor man," writes the chronicler naïvely, "knowing what was going on in Bordeaux, where people were put to death on a simple accusation, without witnesses or form of trial, offered eight hundred écus to be let off. It is true he felt a little guilty." The robbers thereupon increased their demands, and asked for all the church plate. Whilst they were chaffering with the priest, whom they had bound in a retired room, his nephew arrived, ran away and fetched the armed force, which soon gave matters another face. All these revelations enable us to appreciate the horrible state of the country, given up to murder and pillage, and account for the extreme indignation which breathes through the Treatise of La Boëtie, the first draft of which seems to have been written as soon as a dead calm succeeded to this violent tempest. We may trace much of the Anabaptistic tone of the work to the contagion of this great movement of 1548.

I must not forget to notice that the young Duke

of Aumale, afterwards known as the great Guise, was also ordered to march towards Bordeaux; and there exists a letter from the king, who upon his return from Piedmont wrote when at Moulins to the duke, expressing his hope and confidence that the expedition would be easily successful. It is a curious contrast to observe in this letter that the king,—immersed in pleasures, thinking on his way to Paris of nothing but arcs of triumph, obelisks, columns, and inscriptions, of festivals with imitations of the ancient gladiatorial exhibitions, of Florentine comedies after the manner of the ancients, and jousts upon the water, —has scarcely a word to say of the immense insurrection which had brought his court back from Turin. The principal part of his letter, indeed, refers to the fact that his daughter, the Queen of Scotland—that is the infant Mary, betrothed to his son Francis—had just arrived on the previous Sunday, in very good health, at Carrières, where were his own children. Evidently this domestic business touches him more than the public one. We are reminded of Louis Quatorze receiving the future Duchesse de Bourgogne: "I learn by my letters," says Henry, "as well from my cousin your mother, as from the Sieur d'Humières, that my son Francis and she (Mary) were as familiar together the first day as if they had known each other a long time, and no one approaches her who does not praise her as if she were a marvel. This redoubles my desire to see her, as I hope soon to do."

But whilst the king thus thought chiefly of the

beautiful child come to adorn his court and family, the Cardinal de Guise, more practical, had written to his brother, saying, "It is pitiful to reflect how this poor people has so forgotten itself as to disobey the king; but I suppose you will so set them to rights that they will think twice another time." The Cardinal talks also a great deal, however, of marriages and festivals. This letter, by the way, tells us that one Muret, possibly our Muretus, was in the service of the Cardinal, and acted on this occasion as his messenger to his brother at Bordeaux.

The Duke of Aumale, on his way to Bordeaux with his army, pacified Saintonge, which was still in rebellion, without imitating the severity of the Connétable. He was content with the submission of the people and the destruction of the church bells. The Cardinal de Vendome, bishop of Saintes, wrote to the Duke next year to use his influence to allow the bells to be replaced; and from his language it seems evident, that not only were there many Calvinists in Saintonge, but that heresy had taken a peculiar form in 1548, and in that form had been successfully put down. The clergy and inhabitants, he said, had come to him with so many and pitiable remonstrances, that he really hoped the bells would be restored "for the honour of God, who otherwise would be very badly served in Saintonge, especially by those who little approve the service of the church, of whom the number is too great, and who would probably increase if a decent excuse were afforded them for absenting them-

selves from church; namely, their not being aware of the hour when service begins. It would be much more difficult," adds the Cardinal, "to prevent this error from re-entering my diocese than it was to expel it."

In 1549 the inhabitants of Bordeaux also begged the Duke of Aumale, as their natural protector, to intercede with the king for the restoration of their privileges; and it is very likely that in the negociations that took place in order to bring about this result, Montaigne and his father were brought into contact with the Guises for the first time. The connexion of Michel with the great Lorraine family in early life is too evident to be denied. I have no doubt that when La Dixmerie describes Montaigne as coming to court, and much sought after by the Cardinal de Lorraine, and even guided by him in the court as in a world new to him, he refers to some tradition of this early visit, and not to a period subsequent to the death of Charles the Ninth, when Montaigne was an old courtier.

## CHAPTER IX.

### MONTAIGNE AT COURT IN EARLY LIFE.

THE inhabitants of Bordeaux sent a Procureur of the city to present their petition to the king. We learn from Darnal, in his "Continuation of the Chronicle of Bordeaux," that Maistre Pierre Eyquem was elected in 1546 procureur of the city. But this Pierre is described as Sieur de Gaujac, and was evidently the uncle of Michel. He resigned his office, probably from ill health, in the following year. As for Pierre Eyquem of Montaigne, he does not seem to have held any official position during the events I have narrated; but he was, no doubt, present throughout: for where his son at that time was, he probably was also. Very likely, when the peasantry began to rise, he retired, as so many other gentlemen did, from his château into the city, expecting to find safety there. So great was the respect in which he was held by his fellow-citizens, that we are surprised not to find his name mentioned as having been sent to Paris to plead for the restoration of the privileges of Bordeaux.

However, we are obliged to infer a visit to the capital about this period. Montaigne tells us that he knew Paris from "his infancy," by which he means his early youth. He professes to have been at once particularly struck with Paris, and always retained a tender affection for that city. All he finds to blame in it is the sharp smell of its mud, which he compares to t at of Venice. In the comparison he institutes between the states of various nations he condemns France, but remembers Paris to except it. "I am never so angry with France," says he, "that I cease to regard Paris favourably. That city had my heart from my very childhood. Its fate with me has been that of all excellent things. Whatever beautiful cities I have since seen, the beauty of this one wins upon my affection. I love it for itself, and more in its own simplicity than glossed over with foreign pomp. I love it tenderly, even to its warts and its stains. I am a Frenchman only by this great city—great in its population, great in the happiness of its site—but above all things, great and incomparable in variety and diversity of conveniences and appliances of all kinds; the glory of France, and one of the noblest ornaments of the world. May God expel from it our discords! Let it only be united, and it need fear no external violence. I warn it, that of all parties, the worst will be that which shall introduce discord into it. I fear nothing for it but from itself; but I do fear for it as much as for any other piece of this state. As long as it endures I shall not lack a retreat whither I may

retire and die. It is sufficient to make me lose the regret of any other retreat."

The Paris of Montaigne's youth was very different in aspect from the Paris of to-day; yet he speaks of it with the same reverence and affection that does now the Frenchman. When he first visited it, the modern Louvre was rising from the ruins of the old feudal castle destroyed by Francis the First; and the Hôtel de Ville—begun the year of Montaigne's birth—had not yet got beyond the second story. Nearly all the rest of the city was invested with a middle-age character; the hand of the Renaissance being visible only here and there, as in the magnificent Hôtel de Carnavalet, where Montaigne was received in his young days. Vast and, to a certain extent, fortified mansions, the refuges of the great nobility, who were always ready to become chiefs of parties and leaders of the people, were to be met with at every turn, and gave a somewhat Italian air to this northern city. Above the mass of private buildings rose the stupendous form of Notre Dame, far more in harmony then than now with the city it overshadowed; and in various parts, but especially towards the mountain of Ste. Geneviève, and all along the river bank, where are now the wine dépôt and the Jardin des Plantes, stretched vast monasteries, masses of dead wall that resembled fortresses. Thither by day flocked crowds of the idle poor, among whom Irish are particularly mentioned, to be fed on ecclesiastical charity. On the opposite side, the Bastille and the Arsenal frowned over the military quarter; but even then, in

that neighbourhood industry had taken refuge, and factories collected masses of workmen's dwellings about them. What is now the quartier St. Germain was an open plain, where an annual fair, frequented even by the Court, was held—a monstrous prototype of the fêtes of the present day; but the quartier Latin was already the learned quarter, where the schools rose, the students lodged, and booksellers were confined by law. The river was covered chiefly with boats of wine-dealers, distinguished by their bright flying colours, and crossed by several bridges of wood and stone, the latter laden with double rows of houses. The Court, and whatever could be called society, was chiefly collected in the quarter of the Louvre, which palace soon became the favourite residence of the kings. Here it was that Montaigne especially loved to dwell, and with him the Louvre and Paris are sometimes almost synonymous words. In the time of Henry the Second, this city, so "great" in population, contained about fifteen thousand houses and four hundred thousand inhabitants. The streets, even the four chief ones that crossed at the quarter of the Halle, were extremely narrow. Their principal characteristic was the prodigious number of sign-boards that hung out from the shops like wooden banners, and creaked and groaned in each passing gust of wind. Carriages were not yet used in those days, though they became common before Montaigne ceased to write. Courtiers and citizens used the saddle. Henry the Second, the effeminate, seems to have been the first king who habitually rode

in a coach—an elegant vehicle, with a roof supported by pillars.

Montaigne, though a philosopher, appears not in any way to have analysed or studied the population of Paris. He saw nothing but the grand external aspect of the city, the bustle and brilliancy of the Court, the activity of learning, and the general comfort and civilisation of the middle classes. No doubt his imagination was affected, too, by the mighty buzz of the great city, contrasting so strangely with his quiet province—the infinity of cries in the street of hawkers selling all things, from oranges of Portugal, cherries of Poitiers, wine, gilded sweetmeats, to books and prophetic broad sheets; the gaiety and love of pleasure of the inhabitants, who went in those days to dance at the Malmaisons, at Bagnolet, and in the islands of the Seine; the affluence of elegant crowds in the public walks; the strange scenes of the masquerade, when students and citizens by thousands, disguised as wolves, panthers, bears, or asses, streamed through the streets. But, above all, what explains his love for Paris is, no doubt, that all these things were presented to him in very early life, in company with the development of his passions. Paris, as a centre of thought, of business, and political excitement, became known to him at a later period. Its external qualities, no doubt, chiefly struck him in what he calls his childhood.

Henry the Second reigned twelve years, during which time Montaigne was much at court; but it is impossible to decide exactly at what periods. In 1554,

as we shall see, he became a magistrate; but although we may suppose that many of his courtly experiences took place before this period, his appointment did not restrain his vagabond propensities. Even his friendship for La Boëtie, as I shall presently show, could never keep him quiet. He was always, in youth as in age, hankering after the Court; but, in youth as in age, he seems to have been easily disgusted with it. He could never learn to keep his body and his countenance sufficiently under command; his glances always wandered, or some unconventional gesture escaped him. When he sat he never felt seated; and yet he had seen even ladies keep their eyes fixed as statues!

Montaigne talks familiarly of Monsieur de Carnavalet, who acted as horse-breaker to Henry the Second; and refers to stories of equestrian feats which he heard of in his childhood, as performed by Prince Sulmone at Naples. These are topics likely to interest a young courtier; and we need not be surprised that the stable gossip of early life left an impression upon the philosopher's mind.

It is not, however, necessary to establish the exact dates of the events of Michel's youth. It is sufficient if we know their character and the general period to which they belong. Tradition tells us that Montaigne, though so young, much pleased King Henry the Second by his powers of conversation; and he has himself taken care to let us know that he was often in presence of that monarch. "I have seen the king, Henry the Second," says he, "prove himself unable to name

correctly a gentleman of this part of Gascony, [he may mean himself], and he chose to designate one of the maids-of-honour of the queen by her general family name, because that of her father was too difficult to remember."

In 1554 Pierre Eyquem was elected mayor by the city of Bordeaux, and gave general satisfaction. He received François de Maury, the Archbishop, on occasion of his solemn entry into Bordeaux the same year, and delivered a fine speech, as is recorded in the "Gallia Christiana." Soon after, he was sent to the Court on business for the city; and twenty pipes of wine were voted in order that he might make presents to the lords who were favourable to the said city. There can be little doubt, at any rate, that Michel accompanied his father on this occasion.

In this imperfect way, in as far as positive facts are concerned, is the narrative obliged to usher in the period of Montaigne's manhood. All attempts at arriving at a chronology, or at any detailed narrative, have so far failed. There is some important information, however, as to Montaigne's inner experiences, which I shall give after having explained what at this time was the official position of Montaigne. In 1554 the king, in order to replenish his coffers, was engaged in creating new offices for sale. Among other institutions he thought of establishing a Cour des Aides for Guyenne, Auvergne, and Poitou. There was competition between Bordeaux and Perigueux as to where the Court should sit, and the latter city

obtained the privilege for fifty thousand francs. Among the first members elected was "Pierre Eyquem, of the house of Montaigne in Perigord, jurisdiction of Montravel." But before the first meeting Pierre Eyquem received news of his election as mayor of Bordeaux, and accordingly seems to have given up his place at Perigueux to his son Michel, who against the laws, but by special dispensation of the king, became a conseiller at the early age of twenty-one. The fact that he belonged to this court is mentioned in a receipt under Montaigne's own hand, still existing in the National Library at Paris, and the only doubt that remains seems to be as to the date and mode of his nomination, which we may leave antiquaries to dispute about.

In 1557, in consequence of intrigues and disputes, on which it is unimportant to insist, the Cour des Aides of Perigueux was incorporated with the Parliament of Bordeaux. The name of Michel de Montaigne occurs in the registers that record the official reception of the new members on the third of December, on which day it is interesting to know that Montaigne at length became the colleague of Estienne de la Boëtie. Montaigne occupied his new position for thirteen years; but I shall be obliged to speak of him further on in his character as conseiller, and must now mention facts that will show that his office, if not a sinecure, was far from absorbing a very important portion of his time.

## CHAPTER X.

### MONTAIGNE AS A LOVER.

We have Montaigne's own confession or boast that he first felt the power of love when extremely young. If we were to interpret his vague expressions we should be almost obliged to set him up as a rival to Rousseau, whose infantine passions for Mesdemoiselles Goton and Vulson are so well known. He is ashamed to state the exact age at which the tender sentiment took possession of his heart,—drolly compares himself to Martilla,—says the affair was an accident, a sort of miracle, that happened before the time of choice or the development of reason,—in his usual material way, couples this sentimental incident with the wonderfully early development of his beard, "that astonished his mother," he tells us in the words of Martial; and leaves us to guess at all details and consequences.

At a later period of youth, Montaigne, we know, plunged into the stream of boisterous and coarse debauchery, which took its rise in the court of Francis the First, and went on increasing in depth and fetidness until the Valois branch perished. There do not exist,

out of the Essays, materials for saying anything of this part of Montaigne's life. It is necessary, therefore, to develop the suggestions they contain, and to rely on the news we have from other quarters of the general character of the age. All Montaigne's confessions, however, cannot be insisted on. His cynical allusion to his hump-backed mistress is but one among a dozen that must be passed by without further notice.

In the Essay on Paternal Affection, addressed to Madame d'Estissac, there is a vigorous denunciation of the parsimony of fathers; but Montaigne does not seem to have suffered much in this particular. I have little doubt, however, that when he describes the attention of parents as gradually diminishing from infancy upwards, instead of increasing as reason would dictate, he makes reference to his own case.

They had meant him to be a genius, a light of the age, and had made him Conseiller in a Parliament. Fathers treated their children, he bitterly says, as playthings—like apes, not like human beings. If there be any reminiscence of his own experience in this, we need not suppose that when he goes on to talk of a father on the brink of the grave enjoying his wealth alone, and making his sons lose their best years without seeing life, he is expressing any personal feeling.

Many instances appear, however, to have occurred in that time of youths of good families provoked to robbery and all manner of crime by the extreme avarice of their parents. Harpagon, so vigorously painted in the next century by Molière, seems to have

had many predecessors. Montaigne was once requested by a gentleman to remonstrate with his brother, who admitted that he had become a confirmed thief in consequence of the tyranny exercised in the paternal mansion. He had just stolen the rings of a lady at whose levée he was present with many others. Another gentleman he knew of had got into such a habit of pilfering when young, from poverty, that when he came into his fortune he could never pass a shop without feeling, and often yielding to, the desire to steal things, which he afterwards paid for. Many instances of a similar kind had come under Montaigne's own observation.

With reference to this tendency to pilfering, developed in so many persons of good family, it may be as well to mention that Montaigne is not the only writer who alludes to it, although others give a different reason for its existence from the parsimony of fathers. The young princes and courtiers in the time of Charles the Ninth were all accused of stealing in the houses to which they were admitted. The example had been set by that king himself. One day he caused ten young members of the corporation of cut-purses — "les Enfants de la Matte" — to be invited to the Louvre, and entertained himself by admiring the dexterity with which they stripped his guests at a banquet and a ball given for the purpose. All the booty — purses, jewels, pearls, and cloaks — was brought to him, and it was with extreme delight that he estimated its value at three thousand écus. The sight of the court gallants

going sulkily away in their fine dresses without cloaks especially amused the royal wag, who gave back all the plunder to the thieves, and sent them away with a warning that if they continued their trade he would hang them. It is curious to add that the same monarch was an expert forger, and that his brother, Henry the Third, afterwards opened a public gambling-house in the very Louvre, where he played with all comers, and once lost thirty thousand écus at dice to some Italian blacklegs, who had been sent for to Paris on purpose by a band of confederates. The facts mentioned by the Essayist, therefore, lose much of their singularity.

Montaigne informs us, that for nearly twenty years after his "childhood" he lived without any certain means, dependent upon others; that is, upon his family. During that time he spent freely, and never husbanded. He was never more comfortable. It never happened to him that he found the purse of a friend closed, for he got the reputation of being always anxious to pay. He "practised," in the words of Cotton's translation, "at once a thrifty, and, withal, a kind of alluring honesty." Yet he was a bad borrower, preferring always to trust to a letter rather than to an interview. But his manner of life during his youth proves that he was not very straitened for means. Evidently he was very free, both in play and women. Games of hazard especially fascinated him from his early years. Cards and dice were the sources of his pleasure. The taste lasted some time, but he got rid

of it; for although he generally succeeded in wearing a good countenance after his losses, he could not help feeling internally annoyed.

Montaigne incidentally describes a scene in which, in the midst of ladies and cards, he was suddenly seized with a fit of melancholy and thoughtfulness. His companions believed he was devoured by jealousy, or calculating his chances, or regretting his losses. In reality, he was thinking of a man who a few days before, on leaving such an orgy as that, his head filled, as Montaigne's was, "with idleness, love, and jollity," had been seized with a fever, and suddenly carried away. A similar fate, he thought, might be in store for him; and he tries to persuade himself and us that the presence of this idea did not pucker his brow. He constantly meditated on death, he says, "even at the most licentious period of his life."

Where did this orgy take place? Not at Montaigne, and not probably at Bordeaux, under the eyes of his family. Very likely at Paris, whilst he was a student, or playing the part of a courtier, instead of attending to his duties as Conseiller at Perigueux. It is quite evident that "the licentious period of his life" was by no means an episode; and he constantly seizes on the opportunity to tell us, that when young he was gay to an excess. The principal Latin poem of La Boëtie, moreover, is filled with reproaches to Montaigne, on account of his debauchery. The Essayist, like all old men, is fond of repeating and exaggerating the wickedness of his youth; but having always the

care of his reputation in view, he adds, that he no more, when young, missed perceiving vice in the midst of volupty than when old he missed the volupty in the vice. He avoided excesses at a late period from prudence, not from morality. Arguing, perhaps, from his own experience — that is, from the fact that he was not corrupted — he advises that young men should be thrown out into the world in contact with all nations and companions, and accustomed, if necessary, to debauchery and excesses. Rousseau evidently meditated on this hint, and, as we shall see, Rome was highly scandalized by it. All but very subtle readers are apt to miss the point of such a statement as Montaigne's or Rousseau's, and fancy that is given as a precept which is merely an admission of the coarse necessities of life.

It is easy, in reading the memoirs of the time and reflecting on all their revelations of the court of Henry the Second, to imagine what kind of life our truant young lawyer must have led at Paris. It is impossible, however, to paint, except for a secret gallery, copies of the manners of a period when it seems to have been the custom for ladies to overwhelm their lovers, otherwise coy, with presents; when an Italian prince marvelled to receive a young girl in marriage from France uncorrupted; when that strange instrument, so ludicrously exhibited at the Museum of Cluny, was publicly bought at the fair of St. Germain by husbands forced to leave their wives unguarded, until lovers

threatened to murder the dealer if he did not decamp; and when men-servants dressed and undressed their noble mistresses, put on their stockings and handed them their chemises. The records we have of the mingled naïveté and coarseness of that age are astonishing. It was firmly believed by many that a magician once, to please Francis the First, made the toilettes of all the ladies of that prince's court invisible or transparent. Impassioned lovers, when they bought silk stockings, used to go to their mistresses and beg them to wear them for a few days before they put them on. The Court transacted its affairs quite in a family way. Mademoiselle de Limeuil wrote a clever satire when she came to court to attend on the queen, and was whipped with two accomplices for her impertinence. At this time the French ladies had not yet acquired their reputation for elegance and taste in dress. They were taught the art of the toilette by the Queen of Navarre, who carried out the views of her sagacious mother. Indeed, as soon as the influence of Catherine de Medici began to be felt in reality, the corruption of France increased, but became more gorgeous and refined. There was then a perfect fury for adornments and costumes; and, as a historian naïvely remarks, "modesty suffered." I should think so, when at the banquet of Plessis-les-Tours, given by Henry the Third, all the ladies were dressed as men, in green silk; and at one immediately following, given by the Queen-Mother at Chenonceaux, they served

at table almost without any dresses at all! But matters had not gone quite so far in Montaigne's young time, when gallantry was rather fantastical than corrupt.

It is a commonplace to say that love, although the same passion in the sixteenth century as now, took different forms and manifested itself in a different manner. That was the age of slovenly and ungartered, but also of point-device and spruce lovers—as hope or despair was in the ascendant. Those sanguinary and ruthless heroes from whom we shrink with horror, were the most fastidious, and ceremonious, and fantastical, and amusing men in private life. Montluc, Montaigne's friend, the most odious personage, perhaps, who ever dared to print his confessions—for the deepest crime is incapable of this frankness—the man who not only hanged enthusiastically his fellow-countrymen and fellow-creatures who differed from him in opinion, but boasts of having been guilty of the blackest perfidy to compass his ends,—naïvely tells us how he was very much in love, "when he had leisure," with a certain lady—how he wore in her honour hose of crimson velvet with golden fringe; a vest of the same stuff and hue; a worked shirt, also of crimson silk, with a rich thread of gold; and, in order to declare the colours of his mistress, which were white and grey, a hat of grey silk with a silver tie and silver feathers, and a cape of grey velvet lined with silver cloth. We can easily imagine Montaigne setting aside his conseiller's red robe, and decking himself out in some such extravagant fashion, for he is careful to tell

us that when he was young he was not only fond of dress, but that dress became him. Elsewhere, it is true, he talks of his carelessness in the matter of costume when young.

We may, perhaps, count it as rather singular that tradition in the age of *femmes galantes* has preserved to us no personal details of the love-adventures of Montaigne—not a single allusion, not even a scandalous anecdote. Of all other men almost—many of much less importance—we have some information of this kind. It is certain that revelations of weakness and affection, when they come to the knowledge of posterity, give a tender interest to a biography, which indeed seems incomplete and arid without. We may regret even the absence of ingenious fiction. In various "Scenes," Montaigne has been introduced as an Essayist; never as a man.

Are we to suppose that what he relates, or rather insinuates, of his extravagant loves in early life, is merely an exaggeration of memory, the sly boasting of an old man seeking consolation for present restraint; or that such circumstances took place in his student life, among comparatively humble people, whose glances and oglings have not had memoir-writers to watch and record them? However this may be, we know absolutely nothing but what Montaigne himself, in his careless and allusive way, chooses to communicate.

Like Rousseau, he tells us what kind of love-intrigues he avoided, and for what reasons; and assures us that association with beautiful and respectable

women was always most agreeable to him. By "respectable" he does not mean "chaste." He found it necessary always to be on his guard; for, constituted as he was, there was perpetual danger that he should fall in love. He was once terribly scalded in his youth; and felt all the rage which, according to poets, is incident to those who yield to passion without order or judgment. It is true that this *coup de fouet* had since served him as a lesson—for "whoever has escaped the rock of Caphareus shuns the Eubœan Sea ever afterwards; and it is absurd to absorb all one's thoughts in love, and plunge into a furious and indiscreet passion." Montaigne's moralising was provoked rather by the end of his intrigue than the beginning.

Calm men are not unaccustomed to fancy their minds have been ravaged by moral tempests; and we cannot, therefore, estimate the violence of the passion that inspired those eloquent love-letters to which Montaigne alludes, and the destruction of which he regretted when he saw the favour accorded to pedantic imitations of such compositions by the public. "If I still had all the paper I have formerly scribbled over for ladies, when my hand was really urged by passion," he says, "no doubt I should find some page worthy to be communicated to our idle youth, fascinated as it is by this madness." It is curious to compare in our imagination love-letters written under real impulse, by such men as Montaigne, with the elaborate trifling of Maistre Estienne Pasquier, and others of the same

kidney. "No mind," says our Essayist, "which has not given good earnest of its strength at twenty years of age, has ever after distinguished itself." We may, perhaps, fairly infer that the love-letters, of which he had previously spoken, were still in his recollection when he wrote this.

There are times when the minds of all but very practical men prefer rather to deal with latent facts than facts apparent to all the world—with the perfume of a flower rather than its shape and colour—the coy form that flies to the willows rather than the waiter by the wayside—the ultimate meaning of a phrase rather than its mere words; and projects by preference its sympathies, when dwelling on the life of a writer like Montaigne, who has confessed so much, towards what he has refrained from confessing. In such moods I have often endeavoured to create, to invent, to discover his mistress—to snatch her out from the chaos of his general allusions and semi-confidences—to get a glimpse of her, as it were, through the crannies of his style. By this process, however, I found that I was led too near the confines of romance, and, dismissing the phantom that may have been like reality, I have endeavoured, though without complete success, to forget the outline that was drawn, to put together the scattered pieces of the real picture, and boldly leave the blanks without any attempt to fill them up by colour.

Montaigne tells us that he had scarcely more than six mistresses in all, but as he does so in the words

of Ovid, we must take this to mean no more than that he was a model of constancy in that inconstant age. Out of the six, it is no unpardonable curiosity to desire to know who was the favoured one—the one whose remembrance made his heart beat—the one he really loved. But we see her only reflected like a solitary star in the depths of his mind, and cannot tell even to what constellation she belonged. We may be quite certain, however, that she was very beautiful; for he admits, that if he had been obliged to choose he would have preferred beauty to wit. But the woman who left the chief mark in his life, if beautiful, was unkind; or if kind once, ultimately unfaithful. Montaigne, indeed, often talks of the rigour of mistresses, and implies that it was the source of some delight; but this is the way that memory always consoles itself. The desire of pleasure, which is pain whilst it lasts in its intensity, becomes equivalent in force when time has passed to the languor of satisfaction, and is equally agreeable in the after-relish.

Montaigne says that life seemed so desolate to him after the death of La Boëtie, that he would have been quite lost had he not determined to fall in love again. He succeeded in inflaming himself, his age helping; and as little more than two years elapsed between the loss of his friend and his marriage, I once hoped that Françoise de la Chassagne had something to do with saving his life. At any rate, love cured him of the sickness that friendship had caused.

But it would be to misconceive the character of

Montaigne, his country, and his time, if between these two distant incidents—his great passion as a youth, and his artificial passion when disconsolate for the loss of a friend—we did not place many intrigues and partial affections—six, or sixteen, the number matters little. The heart has extempore yearnings that must be satisfied at once. Montaigne was no longer in danger of being led too far. He had already begun to be a philosopher in practice, and triumphantly relates how he opposed the progress of love when he found it to be gaining too firm a hold on him, and how he studied that it should not be so agreeable to him as to take him by force and captivate him entirely.

Despite his affectation of caution, however, Montaigne admits that he joined, without the excuse of sentiment, in the reckless search after pleasure common to the youth of his time; and it is almost impossible to separate his half-boastful reminiscences of mere gallantries from his poignant allusions to one deep, unsatisfied feeling. How naïvely and complacently he talks of the cavalier way in which he used to treat his mistresses! He even blames lovers, men and women, for attempting to exert authority one over the other. *C'est une convention libre.* This is the tone of a gallant of the court accustomed to deal with ladies made fickle by much license, and himself fickle from the same cause. In his time, he tells us, he had carried out "that bargain," as far as nature would allow, as conscientiously as any other bargain. He used only to testify as much affection as he felt, and

boldly confessed the rise, and falls, and intervals of his passion. "In such matters," he naïvely says, "there are fits and relapses." All this is very matter-of-fact, and Montaigne does not yet appeal to our sympathies. He must have been a pedantic and priggish suitor after all, and our knowledge of human nature forbids us to admit that his misplaced frankness could have been charitably received. Michel was a man made to be jilted; and when he says that he never broke off as long as he was held by a thread, and never, whatever reasons were given him, carried a rupture to contempt and hatred, he suggests himself to us in many strange situations. Let us not be more squeamish for him than he was himself. When he writes, "My mistresses have found in me fidelity, even at the service of their inconstancy; I say inconstancy, avowed and sometimes multiplied;" he almost pleads guilty to the patience of a Des Grieux. But afterwards he lets us know, as if ashamed of the fact, that he did sometimes exhibit "rage, and rather indiscreet impatience."

We are not, however, amidst all this regretful moralising, brought any nearer to the Laura or the Beatrice, the Diana or the Ninon, to whom, perhaps gratuitously, I suppose those burning love-letters, the loss of which he regretted, and those Latin poems of which he somewhere speaks, to have been addressed. We approach her society, perhaps, when we see emotion troubling his words, as he writes of these juvenile experiences in old age. We cannot take for

granted, as I have hinted, what we are told about the zest given to his passion by repulse. Women who derive the advantage alone appreciate what appears mere suffering to their admirers, until the passion and the suffering are alike things of the past. However, I imagine that Montaigne's anger and impatience at his mistresses for their double-dealing and evasion of his wishes, though they sometimes burst forth, could not have been very terrible. He was petulant by nature, but in general—as is evident from the easy relations I have alluded to, and from the whole tone of his writings—he regarded women too much as Phryne or Françoise de la Chassagne to have been very serious in his quarrels, except with that one masked and muffled lady, of whom he speaks in the plural number it is true, because he is discreet, because time has passed that way, but with a constrained and merciful bitterness which cannot avoid notice.

Evidently as he goes on trifling with his pen about women, and his loose relations with them, memory individualises some form, and he feels, as it were, the necessity of apologising to himself for that want of tact in early youth by which he lost favour irrevocably with one who was dear to him. See how cautiously he moves about the scarcely cicatrised wound! If he had given fraternal and sharp advice to his lady, and "pinched her where she smarted," it was because his judgment had been formally appealed to. The only ground he had afforded her for complaint was his

absurd scrupulousness. He had actually kept his word when he was expected to break it. A restraint on his passions, which the Queen of Navarre reckoned almost a miracle, he found not to be very difficult. Conscientious Montaigne! He religiously observed the capitulations, the conditions, imposed on him by the trembling lips of yielding Virtue! No wonder he was not forgiven. He had forborne his delight in the interest of the honour of her he loved, had plied her with sage advice, and furnished her with prudent maxims, as a protection against her pretty wrong-headedness. The adventure pleased him, but he "never forgot himself." He always preserved undisturbed the "little sense and discretion" that nature had given him for his lady's use and his own: *a little emotion, but no reverie!*

Decidedly, Montaigne was not a man of his age—not the man to please the robust and reckless, but romantic beauties of the sixteenth century, who could carry the heads of their murdered lovers about in their carriages whilst dreaming of adventures new. I do not think they could have been grateful to him for his extreme prudence for their sake; perhaps they thought it was for his. In as far as he had been able he had, however, incurred personally all the danger of their assignations, and had even chosen the most rugged and unexpected paths in order to avoid suspicion and for greater real facility. Most of the touches in this sketch, given in general terms, are clearly derived from one intrigue or passion. There is no doubt it ter-

minated in a disappointment or betrayal; for Montaigne says, knowing he would have no opportunity of being tested, that if he had to begin again he would again adopt the prudent and reserved system, *however ineffectual it may have proved.*

We may seek in this story for the source of that little jet of bitterness which sprinkles over his pages whenever he comes to talk of women. Who can tell? Perhaps his friendship at first sight for La Boëtie was nothing at the outset but the second ebullition of a feeling which had suddenly been checked. He must have been very well aware of the power of love over him when he fled to a semblance of it as a refuge from grief. At any rate, the pleasure he derived at some period of his life from a noble affection, enabled him authoritatively to condemn as more than brutal the unfeeling gallantry, or rather mere licentiousness, of the times in which he wrote.

It is impossible then, search as we may, to attempt even a guess at the name of the person whom Montaigne most loved when young; but it is certain she was of high degree. "I will say this much," he writes, "of the errors of my youth, that I always despised facile amours, and sought to sharpen pleasure by difficulty, mixing up the idea of glory with my love. The ways of the Emperor Tiberius pleased me; for that monarch was influenced as much by modesty and nobility as by any other quality. Pearls and gold brocade have certainly something to do in this matter; and titles and pomp of life." We are reminded of

Rousseau choosing a less pretty face set off by a prettier ribbon.

Wit, too, was a great attraction, provided beauty accompanied it; for without that quality Montaigne could not be satisfied. Wit, then, and beauty, and rank, and modesty—our researches take us upon high ground, but without further information it is impossible to be more precise. All we really know is that he was unfortunate in his courtship, and that his disappointment left a deep impression on him. It is true, he always tries to speak of love as an affair of temperament that dies away with time. Rarely, he says, we meet with men worthy of friendship; and love fades under the influence of age. "These two passions, therefore, would not have sufficiently satisfied the yearnings of my life." So he turned to books, and his thirst for heart-enjoyment, balked twice, by death and inconstancy, sought to slake itself at another source, which external circumstances could not dry up. But he sat down by its brink weary and heavy-laden. The element of sadness which pervades the Essays, and sobers even the most joyous sentences, has never been sufficiently insisted on; yet it is this, perhaps, that most attaches us to Montaigne, despite his affected worldliness, his desperate doubts, his mild hypocrisies, his tone of comfortable egotism, his inconsistencies, and his trifling. We feel that he too shared that devouring melancholy which, concealed sometimes under irony, and often taking its origin in compassion for self, rises at last into compassion

for the world, and is the distinctive characteristic of the greatest manifestations of modern literature and art. We are all put apprentices to sorrow in our own misfortunes, but how few reach to mastership and learn to sorrow for us all!

## CHAPTER XI.

### COURT LIFE OF MONTAIGNE FROM 1557 TO 1563.

THE future Essayist was at most twenty-four years of age when he became the friend of a man to whom it has been necessary already to make so many allusions —preliminary strains ere his appearance on the stage— Estienne de la Boëtie. We cannot, however, as yet, dwell on these relations, because we have not completely elucidated the position and mode of life of Montaigne. There is no possibility of constructing a chronological narrative. But this is immaterial. I shall endeavour merely to show, that neither friendship nor duty confined Montaigne to Bordeaux between the years 1557 and 1563; and that, in fact, no period of his life was more active. We shall then be able better to understand the incidents of his celebrated friendship.

The reign of Henry the Second, after the great insurrection of Guyenne, was disturbed more by foreign wars than domestic troubles; and his court was, perhaps, one of the most brilliant that France had known.

Catherine de Medici, his queen, was already surrounded by Italian favourites, and labouring to introduce Italian manners. Mary Stuart, who had come as a betrothed infant from gloomy and faction-torn Scotland, was brightening in beauty and fascination in that more congenial atmosphere — like a poison-flower beneath a southern sky. There was, perhaps, not much refinement, but there was a great deal of luxury. Art and literature, too, were encouraged, as well as mountebanks and jugglers. Everything that could contribute to the glare and glitter of the court, and hide the absence of purity and honour, was hospitably received.

As I have already mentioned, we have Montaigne's direct testimony that he much frequented the court of Henry the Second; and some biographers have not only stated that he was gentleman in ordinary of the chamber of that king, but confuse facts so far as to make him appointed thus early Chevalier of the Order of Saint Michel. At any rate, these traditions, which must have had some basis, entitle us to consider Montaigne as having been a very assiduous frequenter of the Louvre long before 1559. To his experience during that period may be referred many of the allusions contained in the Essays to the annoyances of a courtier's life—from the necessity of squabbles with ushers at a door, to the being subject to the fickleness of princes. He had, no doubt, at some time been expected to show off in high places; but says that to serve as a sight to great folks—to lionise, in fact—is a

trade unworthy of a man of honour. Among his varied observations is one which proves how truly he paints the manners of all times from his experience of one. "I perceive in our young courtiers," he says, "that they care only for men of their own sort, and look upon us country squires as fellows of another world—with disdain and pity. But get them away from their babble of court-mysteries, and they have nothing to say for themselves." Few men of genius have been led by accident or servility to associate in any country with persons of the class to which Montaigne alludes without perceiving the same truth; but few complain with less acrimony. He felt, perhaps, more at home from the fact, that though a rustic he was a gentleman; though not powerful, yet a man of property. He easily got accustomed to say Sire, and Your Highness, but not so easily to apply these titles to the right people.

It is unlikely that a man of Montaigne's frame of mind consumed all his time in conversation with jockeys, such as M. de Carnavalet, or in intrigues with the beautiful and dissolute ladies of the court. There were other attractions for him. That was a period of great literary and learned enthusiasm. The reign of Henry the Second coincided with one of the most remarkable developments of the French mind—with a sort of insurrection against routine and vulgarity, that soon became an insurrection against rule and simplicity. That time of exciting discussion and fanatic pedantry—straining towards a result which was not and could not be attained—the elevation

of the French language to classical vigour and purity—produced a wonderful effect, nevertheless, on the literature of the country. The influence which Ronsard had upon Montaigne himself dates, no doubt, from this period; for afterwards when he began to write, the great poet, though neither dead nor forgotten, had somewhat descended from his lofty position. Literary predilections are generally formed in youth—when our minds are, as it were, in a state of fusion, and receive impressions easily.

The aim of Ronsard and his colleagues—known under the collective name of "the Pleiad"—was to substitute for the somewhat artless but sweet literature of the preceding age, in which four or five men of more natural taste than culture had distinguished themselves, a literature of sounding words and lofty periods. Their Poesy should not, they determined, appear in shepherdess's weeds, or crowned with wild flowers, but in all the pomp and majesty of a tragedy-queen. For a time the new fashion was triumphant. Thought never ventured to appear abroad save clothed in brocade, and sometimes fainted under the weight of its costly habiliments. The art of expression, like the art of dress, was used in that age rather to hide than to reveal or suggest forms of grace and beauty. Words and phrases were never in greater honour. Such was the influence of the new school, that the progress of French literature thenceforward, instead of being merely a work of refinement, as in other countries, became also a work of simplification. The French had

to learn, but they also had to unlearn. As we shall see, the part Montaigne played in the great movement was one of reaction against the ideal which he had himself accepted in his youth. But he was scarcely conscious that he was reacting; he modestly thought that he merely fell short of the perfection which his contemporaries had attained in style and expression; and feeling unable to imitate their vast phrases, or wield their gigantic words, gave himself up to a familiar and gossiping tone, and trusted to wit and naïveté for lack of learning.

But although Montaigne was influenced in his tastes by the literary enthusiasm that existed in the court of Henry the Second, we have no ground for supposing that literature formed the chief subject of his thoughts at that period. He was still in the age of love, jollity, and action.

We now come, indeed, to a subject which seems to have utterly escaped the notice of all biographers; I mean, the military experiences of Montaigne as a young man. M. Grün multiplies citations from the Essays to prove an obvious fact, that Montaigne had seen a good deal of fighting in the course of his life; but devout respect for his hero prevents him "from *insulting* Montaigne by ranking him with those warlike magistrates whom L'Hospital so severely reprimanded in the Bed of Justice held at Bordeaux in 1565, for abandoning the judge's bench to go and fill military functions." Not being so tender of the reputation of Montaigne, I was glad to find this allusion as the last

link in the chain of evidence I had fastened together. The position of conseiller and that of soldier seemed to me incompatible. They were so in law, but not, it appears, in practice.

The harangue of the Chancellier de L'Hospital gives us a strange picture of the manners of the conseillers of those times. He begins by blaming the independence of the Parliament, and its tendency to resist the king's orders. Then he points out that it is divided into factions, and that its register contains evidence that the members frequently disputed one with the other, and almost came to blows. He adds, that many scandalous forced marriages had recently taken place. "If there be a rich heiress known, she is for M. le Conseiller, despite everything." Some of them during the troubles had made themselves captains, others commissaries of provisions. Many had excused murders; many were usurers: it was a common saying, that the Conseillers of Toulouse were too grave, and those of Bordeaux too familiar; gambling was common among the latter, who crowned all by neglecting their duties and falsely certifying that they had served when they were absent. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find Montaigne constantly absent at Court, or following the army as an amateur. In his chapter on Presumption he says: "the most notable men I have judged by external appearances have been, in respect of war and military capacity, the Duke of Guise, who died at Orleans, and the late Maréchal Strozzi." Any one accustomed to Montaigne's way of expressing himself would at

once infer that he had served under both these generals, or, at any rate, had followed their armies. But we are here most concerned with the Maréchal Strozzi. That distinguished general, who, as Montaigne tells us, always took Cæsar for model, and was assiduous in studying the "Commentaries," was killed on the 20th of June, 1558, at the siege of Thionville. Montaigne, then twenty-five years of age, was certainly present; and it is not likely he was there in any other character than as a volunteer. Probably he had accompanied Guise and Strozzi in their successful enterprise against Calais and Guignes. These two generals joined the army of Vieilleville, which was laying siege to Thionville, on the 28th of May, and on June 20th Maréchal Strozzi was killed. Vincent Carloix, relating the life of his hero Vieilleville, not only makes out this Italian to have committed huge blunders in opining upon the siege, but paints him as an atheist who died with his mouth full of blasphemies. When Montaigne, in 1580, happened to be at Epernay, in Champagne, he went to the church of Notre Dame to hear mass, partly because it was his custom, and "partly because formerly, when the Maréchal Strozzi was killed at the siege of Thionville, he had seen his body carried to the said church." We are to infer from this passage of the Travels, that Montaigne when young had sufficient respect for the Maréchal to follow his funeral all the way from Thionville to Epernay. In his ripe age he was particularly anxious to know how the place of sepulture was marked. He inquired about it, and found that Strozzi

was buried without any monument, coat of arms, or epitaph, opposite the great altar. They said that the Queen Catherine, his countrywoman, had ordered the burial to take place without pomp or ceremony, because such had been the will of the Maréchal. This statement, however, is probably a confirmation of what Carloix says as to the very unedifying death of Strozzi.

I may here add, that just before the siege of Thionville, a person was employed at Augsburg as a pensioner, secret agent, or spy, who is called the Sieur de Montanus. As I am persuaded that Montaigne had far more to do with public affairs at this period than seems supposed, and as one or two circumstances —for example, the fact that Montaigne, when he afterwards went to Augsburg, concealed his name—for "certain reasons" not given—and went about the streets hiding his face with a handkerchief, not to be known—seem to group themselves round this indication, I was inclined at first to put forward a startling hypothesis; but I forbid myself such indulgences, and endeavour that the germ of my inferences shall always be rigidly contained in my facts. The Montanus alluded to was probably a German.

Further research might, perhaps, enable us to trace Montaigne through many of the chief scenes of the reign of Henry the Second and his immediate successors; but what I have already said will be sufficient to indicate the character of his youthful experiences. It is not likely that he was very constant in his attendance on the army. The Court had always greater

fascinations for him, and we may be sure, that whilst the king showed him marked attention he was not unnoticed by the young queen, Catherine de Medici—as corrupt in mind as in blood—for whom he ever entertained an inexplicable respect, and whom he evidently regarded as a patron, almost as a friend. Some time afterwards, indeed, his relations with her became so intimate that when, by a mere error, he was asserted, in the last century, to have acted as her secretary, the statement was accepted without reserve, as perfectly in harmony with other known facts, and remained incorporated in all biographies until definitively expelled by Dr. Payen.

In June, 1559, Henry the Second received his death-wound from the lance of Montgomery; a circumstance which Montaigne mentions almost in the tone of an eye-witness,—"I hate mortally those games in which people fight for pleasure. I have seen two princes of our royal blood killed in them."

It is particularly to be noticed, that in those days of pageantry—when the Court endeavoured to absorb all the life of the nation—the upper and middle classes "assisted," as the French say, far more than they do at present, at public events. De Thou, not yet six years old, was present at this famous tournament, and says he saw the king killed by Montgomery. His friend, M. de Vic, obtained the *salade* worn by the king, and kept it, still stained with blood, as a curiosity.

"We wore mourning at the Court," Montaigne

elsewhere says, "for a year after Henry the Second's death; and in the opinion of us all silk had come to be so contemptible (mourning being made of cloth), that when we saw any one dressed in it we at once set him down as a citizen. Silks were, indeed, left to physicians and surgeons." The least strained interpretation of this passage is, that, at any rate during a great part of the short reign of Francis the Second, Montaigne, continuing to abandon his province and his duties as conseiller, spent his time in Paris, or followed the Court in its progresses. Two or three other facts confirm this view; and it is important to insist on them in order to understand what Montaigne really meant when he talked, at a subsequent period, of his retirement from the Court and public life. About this great feature in the life of Montaigne more misapprehension seems to exist than about any other.

M. Grün has written a large book, the tendency of which is to reduce the retirement of Montaigne almost to nothing, whilst most critics refuse to consider him as a public character at all, and persist in speaking of him as an odd Gascon gentleman, who surveyed the world from his tower and studied himself from want of other materials to study. Those who desire really to understand the Essays and to know with what kind of circumstances the writer's mind came in contact, how his opinions were influenced, what scenes he traversed, in what way and by what bitter experience he attained the

somewhat painful ataraxia which is his principal characteristic, will cheerfully follow me through this somewhat laborious investigation. It is not sufficient to say that Montaigne had early experience of courts and camps, for so simple an assertion cannot force its way into minds already filled with the contrary prejudice.

A few months after the death of Henry, in September, the king, Francis the Second, made a journey into Lorraine, to accompany his sister Claude, married to Charles the Third, duke of that province. Montaigne went with him, and mentions in his Essays that when at Bar le Duc he saw presented to the king a portrait which René, king of Sicily, had painted of himself. This voyage made an impression on Montaigne's mind, and more than twenty years afterwards, passing at Bar on his roundabout way to Italy, he tells his secretary to set down that he had formerly visited the same place.

This seems to have been the period of Montaigne's greatest assiduity at court; and we may trace to the impression then produced upon him, by Mary Stuart—that brilliant wife of that wretched king, whom popular prejudice accused of drinking children's blood to purify his corrupt frame—the unusual passion with which her execution was afterwards spoken of in the Essays. It can scarcely be accounted a reproach to his memory that he sympathised with one whose beauty, whose station, and whose crimes, obtain sympathy for her even now.

Mary had become the chief ornament of the French Court. She was the darling of poets and the dream of youth. Even pedants loved her, and spoke with pride of the Latin orations, on the pleasures and advantages of learning, which she publicly delivered at the age of fourteen in the Louvre. No one foresaw what fruit the lessons of perfidy and cruelty daily given her would bear.

Playing about the same court was to be seen the child Marguerite de Valois, afterwards the friend and patroness of Montaigne, and the wife of the prince in whom he placed his last hopes. At that time the civil wars had not begun, but the divisions they represented were preparing beneath the surface. Marguerite, in her Memoirs, relates a curious anecdote of how her brother Henry the Third, as a man so bigoted, when a mere boy used to burn her chaplets and prayer-books, because they were Catholic, and try to make her read Huguenot psalms and hymns. This he did, more from childishness and impertinence than any other reason; and poor Marguerite, in her dishonoured old age, makes us smile when she relates her heroic baby resolve to be whipped and killed rather than be damned. Catherine soon found out the heretical tendencies of the young Duke of Anjou, and "constrained him to resume the true, sacred, and ancient religion of his fathers." He afterwards showed that he had, indeed, resumed it; and we do not read that he retained even the humanity of his father, who turned sick at the sight of a heretic burning, and refused to

go with the ladies of his court any more to see such sights; saying, that "they were not amusing."

About July, 1560, Montaigne was again at the court of Francis the Second, as we learn in a very roundabout manner. In the account of his education he says: "I met Buchanan in the suite of the Maréchal de Brissac, acting as tutor to the young Comte de Brissac." Now Buchanan returned definitively to Scotland in 1560, and before that year had lived with his pupil in Piedmont. In July, 1560, the Maréchal came back to France; so that exactly then, and at no other time, could Montaigne have met Buchanan under the circumstances he mentions. In the absence of other accounts of the movements of Montaigne about this period, we are obliged to put up with evidence of this kind; which, however, is conclusive, and which I am surprised no biographer has made use of.

The most profound obscurity hangs over the life of Montaigne during the conspiracy of Amboise, and we do not know whether or not he sympathised with it. The researches of M. Michelet have at length given that event its due importance. It was not yet quite a republican movement; but it was an attempt of the more enlightened middle classes to deliver the monarch from his Italian advisers, and to prevent sovereign power being used as an instrument of persecution against a sect. The conspirators appointed to meet at court on a certain day, and were radiating towards it from all sides, when the usual traitor did his work. The Cardinal of Lorraine and the Chancellor Olivier—

both patrons of the Essayist,—were the instruments of vengeance on the defeated party; but we shall presently see that Montaigne had a friend with different doctrines and higher views. As a partizan of monarchy, accompanied by law and justice, he may have regretted the failure of La Renaudie.

Charles the Ninth became king in December, 1560. There occurs here another lacune in the life of Montaigne, of more than two years. The battle of Dreux, at which Montaigne may have been present—though by saying "our battle" he merely means to indicate on which side were his sympathies—was fought in 1562. That dreadful civil war, which made so deep an impression on his mind, and which ultimately led to his retirement in disgust from the world, had begun. The massacre of Vassy, urged on, as I have said, by the ferocious counsels of a man who bore the same name with him,—a familiar of the Duke of Guise and the Cardinal of Lorraine,—had given the signal of those dreadful convulsions which continued almost without intermission for thirty years; that is, during the whole remainder of his life.

It is nearly certain that our young conseiller, turned courtier, was with Charles the Ninth at Rouen, in October, 1562. Most of the biographers make him to have been present in that city at the time of the declaration of Charles's majority in 1563; but at that very time—from August 9th to August 18th,—Montaigne was in Guyenne, attending on the death-bed of a friend, whom he preferred before all monarchs.

Rouen was besieged in 1562; and though Montaigne may not have been present at the operations, it is probable that he was there soon afterwards, and heard immediately the adventure which he relates on the authority of Jacques Amyot.

However, it is quite certain that about this time Montaigne visited Rouen, in company with Charles the Ninth. The circumstance that made him remember it was the presence of three American Indians — savages, as he calls them — who were introduced to the king. M. Grün, too familiar with the manners of the sixteenth century, informs us that it was an almost invariable custom on the occasion of public festivals to exhibit real or sham savages; troubles himself to discover when there were rejoicings at Rouen, and when there were not; cannot bring Montaigne, Charles the Ninth, and the Americans comfortably together through the labyrinth of his suppositions; suggests that there may be a mistake in the name of the king, in the name of the city — why not in the origin of the people observed, or the individuality of the observer himself? — and at last ingeniously suggests that the philosopher might have been with Charles the Ninth at Rouen in 1562, when there were no fêtes. But this common-sense conclusion, so elaborately arrived at, is drowned at once in a sea of other conjectures.

The biographer unfortunately knows, and therefore cannot refrain from saying, that savages were sometimes brought to maritime cities, not as sights, but in

order to be converted to Christianity and sent back as missionaries, and so on. Montaigne expressly states that one of these savages was a king, who had come with his companions voluntarily, moved by curiosity, to observe the customs and borrow the inventions of Europe. They were all presented to Charles the Ninth, and were shown French ways and pomps, and the form of a beautiful city. Then some one asked their opinion, and wished to know what had struck them most. They answered, three things; one of which, probably referring to religion, Montaigne pretends to forget. Their two other observations were, first, that it appeared strange to them that so many tall, strong, bearded, and armed men, should obey a child, instead of choosing one among their own number to command; and second, that there should exist people crammed with all sorts of riches and comforts, whilst "their halves," meaning their brethren, were beggars at their doors, lean from hunger and misery, and yet refrained from taking them by the throat and setting fire to their houses. Mighty observers were these savages, and it is a pity we know not what the sickly young king said to their philosophy. Montaigne himself conversed with them, but complains that he had a bad interpreter, who could not "receive his imaginations." All he could get out of the one, whom the sailors that had brought him called a king, was, that his only royal privileges were to march at the head of his troops in war, and have a trail made for him through the woods

when he progressed from village to village. "Not so bad this!" exclaims our philosopher slily; "but what then? These poor devils don't wear breeches!"

M. Payen proves that Montaigne was absent from Bordeaux in November, 1562—against the opinion of M. Grün—and not only so, but in June and December, and probably, therefore, in the whole intervening period. On December 1, the Court of Bordeaux had taxed its members for the support of the poor, and Montaigne is mentioned as not having been present to pay his quota. In February, 1563, he was still absent; for M. Nicolas Bresson is ordered to pay monthly, out of the salary due to Montaigne and some others, their share of the tax, until they shall return and pay themselves.

This is the dry, imperfect way, in which we are obliged to speak of the movements of the Essayist during the time of his early manhood. Concerning his inner-life we have far more ample materials.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MONTAIGNE FORMS A FRIENDSHIP WITH ESTIENNE DE LA BOETIE.

DURING the latter years of the reign of King Henry the Second, there circulated "in the hands of people of understanding" a manuscript Treatise, a diatribe against the institution of Monarchy—absolute Monarchy, or Despotism—without any title or signature, but known by those who took the trouble to inquire to be the production of Estienne de la Boëtie, of Sarlat in Perigord, Conseiller in the Parliament of Bordeaux since 1552. This work fell into Montaigne's hands long before he had seen the author, whom it gave him an extreme desire to know. Conceiving our Essayist as a cautious lover of compromise, a detester of extreme measures and extreme ideas, submitting to monarchy as an inevitable necessity in his day, but submitting with a cheerfulness that was half philosophy and half indifference, we are at first at a loss to divine what there could have been for him, I will not say to admire, but to love and yearn towards, in this tempestuous

work, invoking tempests, of his young fellow-countryman. But, with the exception of the Bordeaux insurrection, which may have left more indignation against power than fear, no great manifestation of the popular element had presented itself to Montaigne's experience; and it is possible that, like so many noblemen and gentlemen in more recent times, disciples of Alfieri, he may have hoped to combine the advantages and excitement of revolution with the comforts and privileges of aristocracy. He thought otherwise when the sombre form of Democracy rose up for a moment, with all the grime and all the wildness of one escaping from the pit suddenly into light. The democrat of the sixteenth century in France often carried the cross, and was armed with the dagger; he served the church, and preached and practised regicide.

But before 1557 Montaigne may have been able to sympathise with some of the republican enthusiasm of La Boëtie. He was at any rate just on the threshold of manhood, thirsting for a friend, "a witness of his life," to cheer and guide him; and even if we set aside political ideas, there is nothing surprising in his sudden passion—no other word expresses the truth—for one in whose pages such passages as the following are found:—

"Our nature is such, that the common duties of friendship occupy a considerable portion of our lives. It is reasonable to love virtue, to esteem high deeds, to be grateful to those from whom we have received benefits, and often to diminish our own comfort in

order to augment the honour and advantage of him one loves, and who deserves our love. . . . . Certainly the tyrant is never loved, and never loves. Friendship is a sacred name, a holy thing; it takes place only between worthy people, and springs only from mutual esteem: it feeds not on interchange of benefits, but in contemplation of good life. What renders a friend sure of a friend is the knowledge he has of his integrity; his pledges are the virtue, faith, and constancy of the other. There can be no friendship where is cruelty, treachery, injustice; and between the wicked when they assemble there may be joint action, but there is no society: there is an interchange of fear, not of affection, for they are not friends but accomplices."

Montaigne tells us, that not only did he yearn towards La Boëtie before they met, but that La Boëtie had yearned towards him. This mutual yearning had fed on reports that came to each of the other's qualities. Montaigne had done nothing worth notice that we know of, but may have been celebrated from his peculiar education. At any rate, these reports produced a greater effect on the two young men than was justified by the nature of the things reported. Montaigne thinks he sees the hand of heaven at work.

There is a passage in La Boëtie's Treatise which seems to be an invocation to Montaigne, before he knew him personally, to leave the court, and seek purer pleasures in purer society. All the wretched features of a palace-life are brought out. The courtier is compared, now to the butterfly flaunting into flame

that burns it, now to the satyr that went and kissed the fire brought down by Prometheus, because it looked so beautiful. "Is it possible," cries La Boëtie, "that any one will accept this wretched place of servant to so dangerous a master as a king? What suffering, what martyrdom is it not, good God! to strain night and day to please one whom yet you fear above all others,—always with listening ear and watchful eye looking out for the coming blow, translating the physiognomy of companions, ferreting out traitors, meeting every one with good cheer, and yet doubtful of all, without declared enemies or assured friends, smiles ever on the face and sick at heart, merriment impossible, sadness dangerous!"

This description, in the style of Tacitus, was, no doubt, drawn from experience. There is every reason to believe that La Boëtie went very young to court. D'Aubigné—a rebel who could not understand a revolutionist—tells an anecdote to account for the writing of the Treatise. He says, that one day La Boëtie wished to enter the ball-room of the Louvre, and that an archer of the guard, thinking he looked very young, tapped his toes with a halbert. The fiery young Sarladais upon this ran about the palace calling out for justice, but the supercilious courtiers only laughed at him. All biographers seem agreed to reject this anecdote as apocryphal, because it does not square with their lofty ideas of La Boëtie's character. No doubt the Treatise was not written, as D'Aubigné foolishly supposes, in revenge for this affront; but it is highly pro-

bable—and this view is supported by a passage in the Treatise—that La Boëtie's feeling of independence, his pride, may have some day come in contact with the etiquette of the court and the brutality with which it was supported. At any rate we have a right to suppose that before meeting Montaigne, La Boëtie had been to Paris and the Louvre.

There are very few clear and undoubted statements with reference to the life of Montaigne as a young man. Most biographers make the beginning of his friendship for La Boëtie to coincide with his appointment as conseiller in the Parliament of Bordeaux; and he once says that he knew him six years—that is, from the middle of 1557 to August 1563. But in the Essay on Friendship, or rather on his friendship for La Boëtie, he distinctly tells us that he knew him only four years. We cannot accept the explanation that he alludes to "the most intimate period of their friendship," for the tenor of his remarks is that their friendship was complete from the beginning. But as far as Montaigne's life is concerned, it matters little whether he met La Boëtie in 1557 or 1559. The meeting took place by chance in a great festival or town-party, probably at Bordeaux, and their union was thenceforward close and indissoluble. The appearance of La Boëtie, who had something repulsive at first sight in his complexion or his features, was no hindrance to a sudden attachment. It would appear even that the mutual friends of Montaigne and La Boëtie thought the impromptu nature of their friendship strange, not

knowing, probably, of their previous yearnings; and the latter, therefore, a year afterwards, wrote a Latin Satire to explain and justify what had taken place. In this it is that he lays so much stress on the debauched manners of his new friend, who afterwards himself confesses, that even during this perfect friendship certain volatile affections found place with him — "not to speak of La Boëtie, who admits this but too openly in his verses." As I shall presently show, La Boëtie's amours were not contemporary with those of Montaigne, as the latter seems to imply.

"Our friendship," says Montaigne, majestically speaking of it as of a great fact in nature, that had its necessary evolution and termination, "having so short a time to last, and having begun so late (for we were both grown men, and he older than I by a year or two), had no time to lose, and had no business therefore to square itself to the pattern of weak and regular friendship, which requires so many precautions and so much preliminary experience. . . . . Our souls mixed and melted into one another so completely, that there was no trace of the join left. If I am pressed to say why I loved him, I feel that I cannot better express it than by answering, Because it was he, because it was I. Indeed, beyond the causes I can particularly set down, there was at work an inexplicable and fatal force mediatrix of this union. A thousand influences mastering my entire will led it to drown and lose itself in his, and mastering his entire will led it to drown and lose itself in mine, with equal hunger and yearning. I say,

lose itself; for, in truth, we reserved nothing for ourselves—nothing for him, nothing for me."

Montaigne professes to have known his friend to the inmost core, and I have no doubt this was true. We have, therefore, a right to complain, that knowing so much he has told us so little. We admire those magnificent descriptions of the mutual friendship of two young men who moved hand-in-hand, looking into the depths of one another's souls, through the first years of the civil discords in France, and are dissatisfied that the one to whom long life was vouchsafed has revealed no more of the one who died so near the beginning. We have Montaigne's own word, and the word of all contemporaries, that La Boëtie was one of the most extraordinary men that ever lived; but instead of revealing his doctrines and his power, the Essayist talks eloquently and pathetically of their mutual affection, as if love were any proof of genius! In one place he intimates that La Boëtie's memory had been attacked and torn, and that he had always defended it. But why attacked, and how defended? Was it in compliance with Montaigne's request that Henri de Mesmes did not publish the violent criticism he had prepared on La Boëtie's Treatise? We are not informed; and, to be candid, we must admit that Montaigne did not do all he ought for the memory of his friend. He even shrank from publishing his most important work, misinterpreted its meaning, misrepresented its origin, and the importance that should be assigned to it amongst the productions of La Boëtie.

On the other hand, we must remember that he has done more than he has left undone. Whilst, from prudence or other motives, he suppressed or distorted all facts relating to the Treatise, he embalmed the memory of his friend in a few pages, which as long as literature endures, if all other traces of La Boëtie were to disappear, would ensure immortality to his name. The friendship of these two men has become proverbial. It assumed classical proportions. It influenced the character of Montaigne, helped in developing his mind, gave a tone to his writings, and links the world with its object after the lapse of centuries.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### TWO INGENIOUS WRITERS CONFRONTED.

An episode on La Boëtie is here not only excusable, but necessary. There are few personages in the history of literature about whom so much strange and wanton speculation has been indulged. Neither his character nor his intellectual position has yet been elucidated. Every one seems to conspire to praise and misrepresent him, to place him on a pedestal and deny his title to be there. Even Montaigne, from too great prudence, and perhaps miscalculating tenderness for a reputation left to his care, imposes on us as a dogma the belief in his friend's greatness, and gently diverts our glances from its most genuine manifestation. From his time until the present a series of systematic mistakes constitutes the staple of nearly all the biographies and appreciations of the man whom the sixteenth century somewhat fondly hailed as the greatest it had produced.

Two ingenious and most learned writers have recently, in France, made La Boëtie the object of par-

ticular research—Dr. Payen and M. Léon Feugère. The former, a great excavator of facts relative to Montaigne, full of information derived from documents printed or manuscript, armed with notes and authorities innumerable, deliberately adopts an absurd random statement, to the effect that La Boëtie's Treatise on Voluntary Servitude was written at the age of sixteen. He is led into error, it is true, by one whom we are all accustomed to consider a respectable authority on such a subject,—by Montaigne himself, who ought to have known, and did know, the literary history of his friend.

"A great diversity of opinion," says Dr. Payen, who is usually not superstitious in accepting Montaigne's statements as to dates when he can find the least scrap of old paper that contradicts him, "exists as to the age at which La Boëtie wrote his Treatise, arising from the fact that it circulated at first in manuscript, without date, without author's name, and even without any title. Some writers say sixteen or less, others seventeen, others eighteen, and lastly some, of whom is De Thou, say nineteen. But it is evident, amidst so many doubts, that the person whose testimony we should receive is Montaigne. Now in all the editions which he published during his life-time he had written *eighteen years;* but in the copy annotated for a new edition, and in that of Bordeaux, in which a third of the essays is in his own hand, he has scratched out the word *eighteen* and substituted (I have now the tracing before me) *sixteen.* This word, especially authoritative since it is the result of a correction,

could not have been introduced except for good reasons, and on new information. There is, therefore, no reason for rejecting it, and it is accordingly found in all the editions since 1595:—'But let us listen to this lad of sixteen.'"

An amusing story is told against the Protestants, to the effect that in order to have a youthful prodigy in their ranks to compete with La Boëtie, they purposely falsified the age at which one of their celebrities, Bongars, wrote. I suspect that Montaigne, having already, as I shall show, from political and personal motives, ante-dated the Treatise, hurriedly made this new correction, to which Dr. Payen attaches so much importance, from a mere puerile desire to exaggerate the precocity of his friend; and that he never thought afterwards of comparing his statement with the facts that obviously demonstrated its absurdity.

But, as I have said, Dr. Payen accepts without criticism the incredible assertion of Montaigne, and builds up his little romance thereon: "La Boëtie is sixteen years of age; he has just left college; he has fed on the history of antiquity; he is active, laborious; versification no longer satisfies his precocious maturity; he chooses a subject for amplification, suggested perhaps, as Montaigne says, by Plutarch,—'the inhabitants of Asia obeyed a single man, because they knew not how to pronounce one syllable—No;' he has made a friend at college, one Longa, who has already shown himself indulgent for his verses; to him he dedicates his work, which meets with unexpected

success, excites curiosity, is copied, and circulates in manuscript until the opposition of the day adopts it as it did in 1789, and as it has done in our own day . . . It would seem that the *Servitude Volontaire* made a great sensation when it appeared; for we find in the manuscript Memoirs of Vivant, governor of Perigord, that the people of Sarlat were urged to revolt by the reading of it."

I leave Dr. Payen to reconcile the single fact he adds to his suppositions with the perfectly harmless nature of the Treatise as he interprets it. Imagine a college amplification inspired by classical hatred of tyranny, and directed merely "against Dionysius and Sylla," exciting an insurrection in a little country town!

M. Feugère, for his part, pays no attention whatever to the statement of Montaigne, disdains to discuss the question, is impatient to reach a point when he can be eloquent with ease, and obeying the hint of indolent common-sense, accepts the account of De Thou, which makes the Treatise to have been written about the age of nineteen, and soon after the insurrection in Guyenne. But he accepts also the ludicrous interpretation of the historian, that the sight of the punishment inflicted on the unresisting inhabitants of Bordeaux, when the revolt was over, suggested the idea that "kings have long arms, and always succeed in punishing those who revolt!" "It was to prove this, says our judicious annalist"—I quote the incredible words of M. Feugère—"that La Boëtie composed his discourse on Voluntary Servi-

tude." I own that I have tried to conceive the possibility of a person of good faith reading La Boëtie's passionate invectives against Monarchy, and taking them as M. Feugère professes to do for apologies: but I have not been able. Yet this writer does not stand alone. With the exception of a few revolutionists, who, guided by instinct rather than enlightened by research, have from time to time adopted the Treatise as a machine of war, which it was originally intended to be, and perhaps of M. Matter, who seems to regret that La Boëtie was not "dragged before a Court of Justice," nearly all editors and commentators, unable to escape from the influence of deliberate contemporary misrepresentations, have gone on speaking of La Boëtie as a precocious genius, who, without forgetting that he was a loyal subject, wrote against tyranny in the interest of monarchy, and attacked the government of one, whether imposed by "conquest, inheritance, or election," in order to support that beautiful and venerable institution which allowed the braggadocio Francis and the sawny Henry to wallow in pleasure and blood, whilst the state was driving towards the rocks!

I shall now endeavour, avoiding the discussional tone as much as possible, to bring together the few facts I have been able to gather on the literary and political life of La Boëtie; and shall allege the direct reasons which make me believe the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude to be the production of his manhood. As in this I contradict expressly all writers who have put forward statements on the subject, I feel

obliged, however, here, to show that these writers have made very careless assertions, and are not to be accepted as infallible authorities. Both Dr. Payen and M. Feugère, for example, agree that La Boëtie was born in 1530; but one maintains that he wrote the Treatise at sixteen, the other asserts that it was at eighteen or nineteen. Yet see how they deal with facts, when they have not the question of chronology before their minds! M. Feugère says: "In the passages which La Boëtie borrows from Plutarch he makes use of the translation of Amyot, his contemporary;" and Dr. Payen, annotating the anecdote of the two dogs of Lycurgus, tells us: "This is taken from Amyot's translation of a treatise by Plutarch, entitled, 'How Children ought to be Educated.'" I have not thought it worth while to examine whether La Boëtie *does* use the words of Amyot, because, if the similarity pointed out exists, it is likely that Amyot adopted a translation which came before him and which he found good. The fact is, that the first publication of the Lives of Plutarch by Amyot was in 1559, when La Boëtie was twenty-nine years of age, and already the friend of Montaigne; and the first publication of the Moral Works, containing the Treatise on Education, in 1572, eleven years after La Boëtie's death! M. Feugère, if inclined to defend his position to the last gasp, might suppose a manuscript circulation of the Lives; but M. de Blignières, in his admirable researches on Amyot, has proved, quite without reference to this discussion, that Amyot did not begin the translation of the

Moral Works until about 1560. If, therefore, La Boëtie was obliged to use the translation of another, he must have had communication of a MS. of Amyot, and have touched up his Treatise, which he is represented to have finished and abandoned in 1546, after 1560! What M. Feugère says about La Boëtie following in the steps of Amyot as a translator is less easily assailable; but in 1546 there was published only the "Chariclea" of Longus; and it was not until 1554 that the translation of Diodorus Siculus appeared.

According to M. Feugère, the Treatise was not written in 1546, but in 1549. This leaves time, though not much, for the influence of Amyot, in as far as his "Chariclea" could be influential, to work; but M. Feugère's erudition is so extensive, that he not only unwittingly gathers weapons against others but against himself. When La Boëtie wrote, he says, "a violent but salutary revolution had just taken place in the French Parnassus;" that is to say, Ronsard and his school had appeared. La Boëtie was excited to emulation. He, too, wrote poetry. The twenty-nine printed sonnets of La Boëtie, by no means his first productions, were written "at the same season of his age" at which he wrote the *Servitude Volontaire*; (1549?) and yet in the Treatise we have an account of "the revolution in Parnassus," accomplished after 1550; and we are gravely told by M. Feugère that La Boëtie was a disciple of Ronsard, and actually imitated from him a passage in those very twenty-nine sonnets!

In all the critical notices of La Boëtie that have come under my notice, I have met with the same confusion, the same disregard of the assistance to be derived from comparative chronology, the same want of industry in comparing doubtful with ascertained facts. It is needless further to point out how ill the statements of M. Feugère agree with those of Dr. Payen, or to insist, in opposition to such testimony, on the unlikelihood of a lad of sixteen, not only writing a treatise like the *Servitude Volontaire*, but being able to call himself author of French poetry, of four important translations, and composing at the same time a long series of passionate sonnets to his mistress.

I have necessarily been very much on my guard, on account of these observations, in using the materials gathered by Messrs. Payen and Feugère, and have always preferred dwelling on the statements of Montaigne and other contemporaries, and interpreting them by a method of criticism which close study of the circumstances of the times suggests. It is necessary, however, here to mention, that Dr. Payen has recently discovered a manuscript copy of the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude, which supplies a number of new readings, enables us to correct many mistakes, and altogether gives a slightly more anti-monarchical tone to the language.

Baillet and Klefeker have reasonably placed him among celebrated children. What they tell of his precocity, however, is nothing to what is asserted of D'Aubigné, who translated, we are required to believe, the "Crito" of Plato at the age of eight years! La Boëtie appears to have begun his literary career by translations and French poetry. Nearly all the writers of the sixteenth century, as M. Feugère remarks, were translators; and the mania for translation spread so rapidly that Du Bellay protested, and said that such literary work should only be done at express command of great lords.

French critics speak in high terms of the skill and grace with which many passages of Aristotle, Xenophon, and Plutarch are rendered by La Boëtie; but, as I have said, they all seem to regard him as following in the track of Amyot as a translator, just as they make him follow in the track of Ronsard as a poet! This confusion is chiefly caused by the unanimous determination to antedate the Treatise; but perhaps one of the claims of La Boëtie to fame is, that he wished to innovate in literature as well as in politics, and that he was kept from founding a school, as he refrained from heading a revolution, by a touch of that ironical scepticism and sad reserve which so often prevents genius from exposing itself to the rough handling of the crowd, and deprives the world of so many prophets and martyrs.

La Boëtie's first literary efforts, whatever they may have been, if we are to preserve to him his

reputation for precocity, must have preceded the great outburst of classical enthusiasm, which prepared and signalled the coming of Ronsard. The "French rhymes," which he mentions in his Treatise as having been composed "formerly," were written under the inspiration of Marot. Then seems to have followed a collection of French and Latin poems, known in his day under the name of "Gironde," but probably circulated in manuscript and never printed. His friends used to learn portions by heart and recite them. "I have heard admirable fragments from persons who knew him long before I did," says Montaigne; who, however, could not obtain a copy when he was collecting the works of his friend. No trace of them has since been found.

La Boëtie rarely made clean copies of what he composed, but dashed down verses on the first scrap of paper that fell under his hand, and then contemptuously threw them aside. He was not the man to admire the dribblings of his genius.

At some subsequent period came certain Greek poems, composed no doubt during the erudite fervour; but these also have been lost. We might be writing of Menander or the Flower Poet. The literary history of the sixteenth century, indeed, contains passages quite as obscure as any in the lives of those two Greeks.

The first translation undertaken by La Boëtie seems to have been the first book of the Economics of Aristotle. He next tried his hand at the Economics of

Xenophon — a charming work, which he has translated charmingly. Then turning to Plutarch, he chose the Essay on Marriage and the Letter on Consolation to exercise his pen, and reproduced them with an emotion and an energy that enabled him to master an undisciplined idiom.

It is usual to separate the scanty information existing on the moral life of La Boëtie from what is known of his literary life; but this method must always leave an imperfect impression. In all men there is a nearer relation between sentiment and action than academical narrators are prone to allow. La Boëtie in early life seems, like Montaigne, but in a far greater degree and with more earnestness, to have conceived a passion for a person of exalted station, whose name is not known. This passion stimulated his genius.

Among Montaigne's friends was the "Great Corisande d'Andoins," countess of Guissen, wife of the Count of Grammont, and afterwards mistress of Henry the Fourth. She was particularly fond of poetry, and interested in poets; and in a letter to her the Essayist promises to whisper some day in her ear the name of the person who excited La Boëtie's passion: but no one has ever thought it worth while even to suggest an inquiry as to the incidents of this amour. It seems now too late to repair so disdainful a negligence.

The sentimental history of La Boëtie's love is contained in the twenty-nine sonnets composed at

"the same season of his age" to which is attributed the composition of the *Servitude Volontaire*. Montaigne evidently means that he was about eighteen. Another batch of sonnets exists, addressed to the lady who afterwards became his wife; and are said by Montaigne, somewhat satirically, to have already a certain touch of marital coldness. But this first collection "was written in his greenest youth, when he was warmed with a fine and noble ardour" for that mysterious lady whose name is not pronounced. Montaigne does not shrink from criticism. "You will agree with me," says he, "that these verses are worth cherishing, for there have come none out of Gascony in which are more invention and prettiness, and which show that they have proceeded from a richer hand"—"they are more lively and boiling than the succeeding ones." Later writers have not countersigned this judgment; and some, rebutted by the want of modern smoothness and technical dexterity, declare that the sonnets contain "nothing interesting,—scarcely anything, in fact, but amorous complaints, expressed in rather a rude style, exhibiting the weaknesses and the violences of an unquiet passion, which feeds on the suspicious fears and mistrusts by which it is environed." This excellent description, meant to be depreciatory, first convinced me that the sonnets were worth reading.

It is àpropos of these sonnets that M. Léon Feugère, usually so judicious, makes the singular mistake of describing La Boëtie as the pupil of

Ronsard. We are told that the young poet, escaping from the influence of his master, "avoided the double rock of Italian affectation and pedantic rubbish." La Boëtie is praised for preserving traces of the melancholy reverie of Villon, the grace and facility of Marot, whilst others succumbed to the dangers of maladroit imitation. All this may apply to some of the later productions of Estienne, although he seems always to have belonged to the school of which Saint Gelais was the chief, and which made love the chief subject of its writings; but unless we adopt an entirely new chronology, and not only assign, as I do, a new date to the Treatise, but reject all the testimony of the sixteenth century, it does not apply to these twenty-nine sonnets, which are unanimously declared to have been written at least two years before any of Ronsard's poems were published. Yet M. Feugère, curiously inverting facts, gives two parallel passages, one from the sonnets of La Boëtie and the other from Ronsard, in which the former is said to have imitated the latter. It is astonishing also, in face of Montaigne's express assertion that La Boëtie addressed a real personage whom he loved, to hear any talk of the imaginary mistresses who may have inspired such learned triflers as Pasquier, and the fifty or sixty gentlemen who brought to bear the whole force of their intellect at Poitiers to immortalise a Flea—although in this case also I suspect the assertion is a mere cover to their gravity—but had certainly nothing to do with the origin of the passionate stanzas of the young Estienne.

For my part I cannot fix a precise date to La Boëtie's first collection of sonnets; but I think it evident that Montaigne means that they were composed long before the age of twenty—at any rate, before 1550. I do not intend to analyse them as poetical works, or to appeal further from the decision which has classed them as mere curiosities—at best as proofs of the influence of "the king of poets and poet of kings." But I shall note one or two expressions which are as pretty in English as in French, and one or two allusions to the position of the object of love and to attendant circumstances.

"Pardon, Love, O my lord, I dedicate to thee the remainder of my years, my voice, my writings, my sobs, my sighs, my tears, my cries." The poet says, he had fought proudly against love until it overcame him by main force. Writing a month after his defeat, he feels the defeat to be irrevocable. "It was when, the heats being over, autumn went about treading in the vats the full grape under his slippery foot." "The peasant was beating his gathered sheaves, and rolling his boiling must to his cellars, and loading his lofts with fruit." "I saw her piercing eyes, I saw her bright countenance, and none without injury can gaze upon the gods! Cold, without courage, her victorious glance left me, stunned by the shock of so powerful a light. I was as one surprised at night, out in the fields, when it lightens!" His lady's eyes that had this effect upon him were green; an expression that, no doubt, had nothing ludicrous

in it at that time, although, shortly afterwards, Shakspeare, probably referring to the poetry of the Pleiad, makes fun of it. Thisbe's eyes, according to him, were "green as leeks." Has the influence of Ronsard and his School on Shakspeare been pointed out? Has the famous description of the war-horse by Du Bartas been compared with that in "Henry the Fifth?"

Further on La Boëtie says that he dare not express the great name of her he loved in his verse, but that the people, astonished to hear her praised so much, desired to know her, endeavoured to give her a name, and sought her sacred name at hazard. This is no doubt a poetical license, intended to introduce the hyperbolical praise: "if they want to know her, let them choose the most perfect among the perfect and boldly exclaim, It is she!" But we may reasonably infer that some curiosity had been excited by the six early sonnets circulated among friends in manuscript. La Boëtie yearns after the time when he should be able to make all France resound with her name, which he often wrote down and as often effaced. At last he gives her the name of the river on the banks of which he lived; calls her his Dordogne, —as he had perhaps called some previous mistress his Gironde—and plays prettily on this fancy. An accident, real or imaginary—a tempest—separates him from his love. He addresses the winds, and says,— "Go and frighten the merchant who seeks his treasure on the seas; I am not to be thus easily cast down."

Once he receives a letter, and of course is in ecstasies —promising to build an altar to place it on. His doubts and suspicions return; he asks to be punished, and his lady says to him, "I forgive you. But my decree is, that you spend your years in enriching France with my name through your verses." No other favour could he obtain than this encouragement to write, and he begs his friends not to request him to love her no longer. "All I expect, however," he says, "is to obtain some sighs of sympathy from the people of the future, and that some one shall compassionately say, His lady and he were destined to live until death, the one in purity, the other in love." These professions of despondency, however, are not very sincere, and the last sonnet has a calm and tranquil tone, which leads us to suspect that after all the nameless love of La Boëtie had not for ever the coldness or the virtue of a Laura. How the amour ultimately ended we know not, but can guess. La Boëtie's mistress was a great coquette, who inspired and destroyed, he says, "more sudden loves than autumn beats down leaves upon the plains, or than the pleasant spring renews." The song complaining of an unfaithful mistress may be considered the conclusion of La Boëtie's great passion.

La Boëtie's second series of sonnets was addressed to Marguerite de Carles, who subsequently became his wife. Marguerite belonged to a family which was already allied to his by marriage. She was a widow, with two children; one of whom, named Jacquette d'Arsac, after-

wards married a brother of Michel de Montaigne, and had a son, who was killed fighting against the English in the isle of Rhé in 1627. We do not know what interval elapsed between the youthful and irregular love of Estienne and his second more honourable one. He seems to have known Marguerite long. She greatly influenced his literary character. By her command he translated a long extract from Ariosto, and sent it to her with a graceful and witty epistle in verse against translators, which shows him to have had a most flexible and varied mind. The twenty-six new sonnets of La Boëtie contain, of course, very few biographical allusions. That form of poetry was in those days, and especially in the hands of La Boëtie, very much composed of conventional phrases and exaggerated conceits, copied from Petrarch and applied rather at haphazard. Still, here and there, in the midst of the vaguest generalities, we have agreeable personal allusions. Marguerite was evidently a learned lady. Her lover talks of her manner of walking and dancing, but also represents her as constantly reading and writing, and records:

"La belle majesté de son grave silence."

They exchange presents of books: Marguerite sends to her lover the *Arte di Cortegiano* of Balthasar Castiglione, probably to prepare him for some visit to court, possibly that he might learn not to allow his independent spirit to come once more in contact with etiquette at the Louvre.

Among the works attributed to La Boëtie, and now lost, is an historical description of the Wild and Solitary Country of Medoc; and it is, therefore, interesting to point out that the last sonnet but one of this collection reads as follows:—

"This day the bright heat of the sun has gilded the long tresses of the beautiful Ceres; but now it retires, and my Marguerite and I enjoy the freshness of the sweet evening. We follow out through the woods some path that has gone astray. Love goes before, we walk behind; when we are wearied with the green of the deep forests, we go down to see the colour of the meadows. We live free from troubles, and have no care for kings, for the court, nor for towns. Oh! Medoc, my wild and solitary country, there is no land more agreeable than thou art in my eyes. Thou art at the end of the world, and that is why I love thee. We are the last to hear of the misfortunes of our time."

In this pleasant manner, indeed, terminated the courtship of La Boëtie with the fair and learned widow. They married, but at what date is unknown. Their lives afterwards seem to have been as happy as the marriage state, with all its revelations of mutual weakness, allows. They were both well read, and full of taste. Marguerite, like many other ladies of her time, at the head of whom was Mary Stuart, was proficient in the Latin language. Her husband, about to depart on a long journey, addresses her some charming verses, in which, with the confidence of affection, he paints the joy she will feel on his return; her alternate

blushes and pallor when, leaving her household occupations, she will hasten to meet him; her embraces, her silent contemplation of his face, her voice choked by tears, her welcoming words at last. He describes, in language that sometimes is arranged with something besides classical ingenuity, the whole household in a tumult of joy, the servants hurrying to behold their long-absent master, the logs heaped on the fire. We are forced to imagine the Castellet actually the scene of such a return; or the house in Medoc. In fine, La Boëtie expresses a hope that Death may find them both there in their quiet country house, waiting, grey-headed, his decree. As we shall see, Marguerite long survived her husband.

La Boëtie's repute for learning, wit, and eloquence, may have contributed, as the biographers fondly suppose, to bring about his election as Conseiller of the Parliament of Bordeaux; but family influence, no doubt, played its part. We may be here passing by the period at which the *Servitude Volontaire* received its last touch, and was put in circulation; but this cannot be determined.

It was on the 14th of October, 1552, when he had not attained the age of twenty-two, that La Boëtie was elected Conseiller in the place of a M. de Lur. An examination as to fitness, however, was now necessary, according to law, though often dispensed with by corruption. One aspirant conseiller, totally ignorant, obtained his admission by sending a large block of marble to the king, and was ever after known

as The Marble Conseiller. But Estienne was prepared for any test. According to the manuscript registers of the Parliament of Bordeaux, on May 17, 1553, the chambers assembled "to proceed to the examination of the Sieurs Pommier and La Boëtie, who, having been found capable, were allowed to take the oath."

It is worth noticing, that among the Latin poems of La Boëtie is a distich addressed, not to this Pommier, as M. Feugère supposes, but probably to his father, "a good old man." The two young men who entered Parliament and took the oath together, were probably intimate friends. A Pommier is mentioned among the persons condemned to the galleys in 1548, on account of having been connected with the insurrection.

According to Montaigne, La Boëtie became "the oracle of his company," and acquired in that rank more reputation than any other man had ever done. A tradition difficult to substantiate, but easy to be accepted, says, that as long as he exercised his office he never gave his vote without considerable emotion; which, as he was a judge, often deciding on questions of life and death, is not surprising to us, but seems to have been unusual in that reckless age. We shall see further on at what a perilous period for character and reputation La Boëtie was called upon to exercise the functions of judge. The crime against which the Parliament of Bordeaux was most severe was the crime of heresy. It was a burning, hanging, and persecuting court.

La Boëtie, though there can be little doubt that he felt at one time the influence of the spirit of religious as well as political revolt, remained in name a Catholic. But I believe his mind in reality, shrinking equally from the two parties, one of which was too ferocious and dogmatical, the other too aggressive and perilous, took refuge at last in a kind of philosophical Paganism; at any rate, in so individual and undoctrinal a view of Christianity, that few now would accept him as orthodox. But this was after he had hurled himself with the blind devotion of youth against the adamantine bulwarks of wrong, and had fallen, bruised and bleeding, to their base.

## CHAPTER XV.

### LA BOETIE WRITES A TREATISE AGAINST DESPOTISM.

MANY of the circumstances which I have related must evidently have occurred subsequently to the writing of the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude, to which we must now turn our attention, and as author of which La Boëtie, considered as other than the friend of Montaigne, the layman of the Essay on Friendship, really claims celebrity.

I have already mentioned, that one tradition makes the *Servitude Volontaire* to have been written at the age of sixteen (1546), and another at the age of eighteen or nineteen (1549). The latter opinion is adopted, not only by M. Feugère, but by M. Henri Martin, author of the most admirable narrative history of France. The origin of it, as I have already intimated, is to be traced to De Thou, who, though perfectly acquainted with his friend Montaigne's statement, takes it not into account, and tells us that the aspect of the sudden calm which succeeded the insurrection of Guyenne suggested to the mind of the

young La Boëtie the important fact that "kings have long arms; that their power is communicated from one person to another, and that thus a sort of chain is formed which captivates men, and subjugates them necessarily!" La Boëtie's object in writing was no other than to prove this. When he took pen in hand he had already "a superior mind and a formed judgment, which rendered him subsequently one of the principal ornaments of the Parliament of Bordeaux. Those who published his book after the celebrated day of the Saint Bartholomew, which took place twenty-four years later, gave it a very different sense from what the author intended."

We must remember that De Thou wrote under the monarchy, on which he was dependent, and amidst constant persecution for his liberalism; and that he had a long correspondence, which is extant, with our James the First personally, in which he was forced to excuse himself for seeming to approve of the death of Mary Stuart; if we would understand the cautious misrepresentations of De Thou. The facts of La Boëtie's life were evidently so little known by the public of the sixteenth century, that writers used them as tragedians use the fables on which they base their pieces—treated them as mythological and heroic materials, to be modified according to the exigencies of art or doctrine. Their chief object was to express admiration for this great citizen, unfortunately born the subject of a luxurious and sanguinary monarchy, which they themselves dared not hate and condemn. None of them looked

forward to the time when the denunciations of the enthusiastic young democrat should be heard and answered. The gloom of despotism seemed to have settled down for ever upon France, and the greater part of Europe. No one as yet foresaw the possibility of establishing perfect freedom by the side of a throne, even with its assistance and under its shadow.

Monarchy seemed one of the conditions of human existence, like disease or death: it was evil the foil of good. To attack it, was to aim at happiness and beauty above our lot; was to commit a sort of splendid impiety, as if the creature should accept from the Creator all blessings and refuse all chastenings. La Boëtie, in the eyes of these prudent literary gentlemen; these philosophers, who kept on good terms with the sacristy; these magistrates learned in texts, who had bought their places as estates, but who were comparatively virtuous, of cultivated tastes, and capable of high views,—he seemed to them, we must believe, to have gone up to the Empyrean and brought down fire, the purity of which they acknowledged, but which would dazzle the eyes of the profane vulgar. He had dreamed a dream of purity amidst corruption, such as only Marina might have dreamed in the house of Frost. They entered, therefore, into a tacit conspiracy to mask him from the world. Montaigne spoke of him as a "marvellous boy;" Baillet classed him among remarkable children; and De Thou, with imperturbable confidence in human love of subtilty, attributes to him a dialectical extravagance, a sort of boomerang mode of

reasoning, which might be natural in a pedantic old lawyer, but which is incompatible with the fire and honesty of youth.

Moreover, even in modern times, except by some republicans,—with the idea of using La Boëtie's work as a pamphlet, an incitement to insurrection,—no attempt has been made to show that the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude was anything more than an attack on ancient tyrants in the interest of the mild and legal monarchy of France; or the academical essay of a lad of genius, who afterwards learned to know better and discard his "statuesque republicanism," and look upon the world as something else than "a mere stage for declamation."

Montaigne's own account, though full of suppressions and some wilful misrepresentations—destined, it would seem, to protect his friend from the horrid charge of having continued to the last a revolutionist—is much more natural than most others. The *Servitude Volontaire* is a discourse, he says, which those who knew not its original name have since rebaptized, very properly, the *Contr' Un*. La Boëtie wrote it by way of essay in his early youth, in honour of liberty against tyranny—"when he was not yet eighteen years of age," says the edition of 1588; but this phrase was afterwards expunged because it disagreed with the new version of "sixteen," wantonly adopted by Montaigne soon before his death. We must observe that the friendly tone of apology obscures the related facts. By way of essay! Not a word of the troubles in Guyenne,

or the crimes of monarchy in general! Yet the truth is implied here, though not found in the indifferent statement of the age of the writer, now inserted, now erased. "Early youth" is the period of illusion and enthusiasm, be it sixteen or twenty-six. "The Treatise had passed into the hands of many people of understanding, not without very great and merited approval; for it is pretty, and as full of matter as is possible. I do not say that this was the best thing he could do; and if, at the more advanced age when I knew him, he had entertained a similar design with mine to put his phantasies in writing, we should have seen many rare things, which would have taken us very near the honour of antiquity; for in this part of the gifts of nature, (the power of writing), I know none comparable to him."

Montaigne then goes on to say, that with the exception of the opuscules he had already published, and some memoirs of the famous Edict of January, 1562, (which he definitively suppressed), nothing remained of La Boëtie but this discourse, which was preserved by accident, and "had never, he believed, been seen by the author since it first escaped him." It is important to notice, that this last detail is a constituent part of Montaigne's statement. He expressly tells us that the Treatise was written at one time—at one breath, as it were—and was not afterwards revised and corrected. He denies what he must have known to be true—that it was on this treatise La Boëtie had lavished all his pains and intellect.

The reason, indeed, of the importance I assign to the approximative establishment of the date at which the Treatise was written, is this: I consider it the capital work of its author, the work which contains his deepest convictions and his highest aspirations; a work perfectly mature, unless maturity implies the beginning of corruption; a work full of thoughts, such as only the breast of youth, it is true, harbours, but expressed in language that reveals an art and a knowledge to youth seldom given.

Indeed, I am persuaded that—whatever may now be the opinion of the critics, patrons, and admirers of La Boëtie—his friends who survived him in the sixteenth century regarded him simply as the author of the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude; the first man who perceived, when France was beginning its deplorable journey towards unity and equality by the aid of kings, that there was another alternative.

My convictions are, first, that La Boëtie wrote the Treatise when very young—and in this I agree with universal testimony; second, that he was, nevertheless, not only more than sixteen, but more than nineteen years of age when he gave it much of its present form—and so far I contradict all the statements of contemporaries, which would be bold, indeed, if all these statements did not contradict each other; third, that the Treatise, perhaps based upon a sketch thrown upon paper in 1549, under the excitement of the affair of Bordeaux, was composed between 1551 and 1553—and this agrees with De Thou, where he implies that

the work was written before La Boëtie became a member of the Parliament; but, fourth, that he constantly touched and retouched it, which may account for some of the innumerable discrepancies that exist, not only between the various printed copies, but between all these and the manuscript of Henri de Mesmes, recently discovered by Dr. Payen. This manuscript proves, too, that editors from timidity have themselves tampered with the text, and made it less directly anti-monarchical. One of the most remarkable instances is this: "There are three sorts of tyrants — by election, by conquest, by succession." After tyrants, all the editions have, "I speak of wicked princes," an alteration evidently made as a saving clause for French kings; whereas La Boëtie intended to include all kings. M. Feugère lays stress on this saving clause, when he argues that La Boëtie was not really anti-monarchical. Elsewhere, speaking of the Lacedæmonians, the printed editions say that they would rather have died a thousand deaths than recognise any other lord than Law and the King." La Boëtie wrote "Law and Reason."

I need scarcely enter into any criticism of the literary character of the Treatise. By common consent, it is classed now among the masterpieces of the French language. No one denies it to be full of eloquent amplifications and fiery apostrophes, of sentences, of images, of turns of phraseology that render it a marvel, no matter at what age written. Its influence has been

great, especially on the style of republican writers in troublous times.

There are passages in Milton's prose works which would seem written under that inspiration, if Milton, equally imbued with classical literature, and more copious, more enthusiastic, more republican still, did not rather naturally fall into the same tone. We find reminiscences of La Boëtie in Rousseau, in Lamennais, in all who have had occasion to attack Monarchy.

On English readers, who neglect to carry back their imaginations three centuries, and into another country, his tone sometimes produces an unpleasant effect. Misled by the name of the office of our chief magistrate, against whom boys of sixteen, less cultivated than La Boëtie, perhaps now imitatively declaim, they are offended by this terrific attack on Monarchy; which is, of course, as inapplicable to any part of our institutions as a diatribe against an Elector of Hanover would be if applied to an Elector of Westminster.

The Treatise is addressed, after the classical model, to a friend of the author, named Longa, to whom he had been previously accustomed to show his French verses, and who used to encourage him by his approval. This hint is given on occasion of the quotation of two lines from some poem in favour of liberty, which the author had written "formerly, when he used to pass his time in composing French rhymes. For I will not fear," he adds, "in addressing thee, O Longa, to

mingle here and there some of my verses, which I never read to thee without being made proud by thy seeming approval." The lines quoted are as follows:—

> " Mesmes les bœufs soubs le pois du joug geignent,
> Et les oiseaus dans la caige se pleignent."

This, by the way, is a proof that the speculations of La Boëtie in the Treatise were not isolated, but that the glorification of liberty and the condemnation of tyranny had occupied his pen long before.

M. Léon Feugère calls this said Longa, who is mentioned twice in the Discourse, "an unknown personage;" but Dr. Payen informs us that he was Bertrand de Larmandie, fourth of the name, Baron de Longa (or Longua), a château in the neighbourhood of Sainte Foix, and not far from Montaigne. He was nephew of the Bishop of Sarlat, and related by marriage to the Montaigne family. I have sought to obtain further information about him by independent research, but have only found, after reading as much as would have enabled me to master the elements of a science, that a person named Longue was secretary of Henry the Second in 1558, and that Longa afterwards belonged to the Reformed religion, and is several times mentioned in the correspondence of André de Bourdeilles, Syndic of Perigord in 1574. He seems to have been an influential person in his province, and Charles the Ninth wrote to him directly, and exhorted him to loyalty. Longa promised to live quietly according

to the edicts published after the Saint Bartholomew. Subsequently Henry the Third wrote to the Maréchal Montluc not to molest this same Longa, and also to redress certain wrongs committed against him by a serjeant of Captain La Place.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SOME ACCOUNT OF THE TREATISE ON VOLUNTARY SERVITUDE.

WHOEVER would appreciate the frame of mind in which La Boëtie wrote his great work, must not only recur to the narrative I have given of the insurrections in Guyenne, but endeavour to picture to himself the frightful cruelties and exactions that led to an outbreak so violent and wide-spread. He must also remember that the description of a king given by Samuel is almost the same as that given by La Boëtie: indeed, many of his expressions are translated from the Scriptures. The young Sarladais recognised in the conduct of the princes that reigned over him most of the features described in the Sacred Volume, some not described. Every form of debauchery, even incest in various degrees, was publicly practised at court. Virtue, modesty, honour, even common honesty, were derided. The extravagance was so reckless, that in spite of the most ruinous taxation all attempts at filling the treasury, even for a moment, failed. Money destined to support armies, or pay debts, was squan-

dered on mistresses and minions with a profusion that would be incredible, if anything wicked were incredible. The taxes were collected with a violence and injustice unknown now anywhere save in Eastern despotisms. Amidst huge talk of law, and an incredible abundance of lawyers, there was nothing to protect an individual from the rapacity of power. Add to all this, that every heart was panting with a new desire—"liberty of conscience;" and that to express such a desire was a crime punished with death by the fagot; and add, again, that the kings—Francis the First and Henry the Second—used actually and literally to attend with the ladies of their courts to see their fellow-creatures burned, simply as an amusement; and the subject of wonder is, not that La Boëtie incited his countrymen to rise and put an end to this horrible scandal and oppression, but that he was not listened to.

The principal scope of the Treatise, indeed, is not to discuss whether Monarchy is a good form of government, but to excite people to overthrow it. It would appear that even in those days the debating-society question, as to the relative merits of monarchy and "other forms of the republic," was in vogue, probably among young men. La Boëtie refuses to enter on this ground. Monarchy, he says, has nothing public in it. It is an extreme misfortune to be subject to a single man, who may be good and may be bad—this is all. Every one, he assumes, feels the rigour of the yoke. What he undertakes to prove is the facility with which it could be shaken off. As Montaigne observes,—

"The saying of Plutarch, that the inhabitants of Asia obeyed one man, because they did not know how to pronounce a single syllable — that is, No — furnished, perhaps, the matter and the opportunity to La Boëtie of his Voluntary Servitude." The young demagogue had, indeed, already perceived the servile unwillingness of his countrymen to say "No." He therefore narrows the debate, and appeals to the passion of pride, evidently with the direct intention of exciting a revolution; and there is no doubt that his preaching was almost successful a few years later. "How is it possible," he asks, "that so many men, so many boroughs, so many cities, so many nations, should obey a single tyrant, who has no power but what is given him — who has no power to injure them, except inasmuch as they have will to endure?" This is the idea developed in the Treatise, under an infinite variety of aspects, in the most eloquent and passionate manner; and whoever can read it, and mistake it for a juvenile exercitation, must have his heart imbedded in eternal academical ice.

The origin of monarchy, or rather the reason of its force and persistence, is, according to the Treatise, that people are "enchanted and charmed simply by this name of One." La Boëtie, no doubt, had observed the peculiar adoration of his countrymen for the idea of unity; by which they mean, the assimilation of all things to one conventional type; the destruction of one of every two opposing elements; the stifling of the negative in presence of the affirmative; the silencing of

contention; all the free steps of nature set aside for the military tramp; absence of contrast; subjection; moral death. They appear to strain after this hateful result with the passionate energy of fear. The sound of antagonist forces in the air smites them with dismay. Rival religious sects, political associations with inter-destructive principles, a free press, all the bustle and apparent confusion of a human society, varied in appearance as the inflexions of human character, they cannot away with. This explains the frantic eagerness of the majority to crouch at the feet of power, and urge that power, whether it be monarchical or revolutionary, free-thinking or religious, to kill, exile, and gag the minority. A victory which does not exterminate the adversary is scarcely a victory in France. This is the vice of the national mind, against which such men as La Boëtie have always protested and struggled, though aware that failure in the attempt may be martyrdom. But the democrats and free-thinkers have usually truckled to, or shared it, as well as Louis the Eleventh and Cardinal de Richelieu. Fierce revolutionists have absolved those cruel tyrants, because they laboured in the "sacred cause of French unity;" that is, of slavery. I have never met a French sceptic, who was not deceived by the hypocritical unity of the Catholic Church, who did not say, that if of any religion he would be of that religion, and who did not consider it an unanswerable attack on Protestantism that it was "divided into contending sects." They make no account of the irresistible tendency of

human passions, tastes, aptitudes, to transform in our mental mirror the reflection of truth, which is One; and unless the reflection also be One, or called by the same name, which satisfies them, they go on their way with a query, like jesting Pilate. Unity of doctrine, unity of power, unity of institutions, laws, customs,—that is to say, under some form or another, democratic or monarchical, the negation of liberty,—this is the dream of poets, patriots, usurpers, and revolutionists in France; and to realise it they will stop at no absurdity, and shrink from no crime.

We are all, more or less, liable to be irritated by the presence in this world of opinions different from our own. But some love discussion and the exhilarating clamour of debate. In England we are angry with our opponents, but we are not afraid of them. We do not shrink from the intellectual fatigue of wrestling with them, and are even impatient to go down into the arena.

This is not so, and never has been so in France. Differences of opinion arise more often, perhaps, there than elsewhere, but they are almost always individual protests. Here and there, dispersedly, some original mind revolts against the horrid uniformity which public opinion would impose; but its effort is stifled, or becomes celebrated only as a scandal. It is astonishing, to one who attentively observes, to notice how under the gay, off-hand, seemingly spontaneous conversation, even of French youth—under the varied forms of a literature more artistic within its narrow

bounds than any other in these modern days—lurks the stock of congenital convictions, differenced occasionally by some individual prejudices and crotchets. Human nature seems divested here of its most magnificent characteristic—Diversity; the characteristic which, however paradoxical it may seem to say so, contains its resemblance to the divine nature. The true road to unity is diversity. Nothing is more pitiful than the unity of men who are obliged to suppress all vigorous and original movements in order to arrive at agreement in some single statement.

La Boëtie is not so unreasonable as to maintain that nations are culpable for choosing some great personage, who has been useful to them, to be their governor, although he thinks it not wise to exalt a man from a position where he has done good to one where he may do harm. But his indignation rises when he turns from this supposition to the truth, and beholds the world,—that is, France,—not obeying but serving; and a prey to the avarice, cruelty, and licentiousness, not of a Hercules or a Samson, but "a mere mannikin, generally the most cowardly and effeminate of the nation—not only unknown to the dust of battle, but almost to the sand of the tournament-field—not only incapable of commanding men, but corrupted by vilely serving the meanest little female!" This description well applies to Henry the Second, living in the toils of his father's cast-off mistress.

The contemptible submission of millions to one is described in a magnificent accumulative style. La

Boëtie proves that it cannot even proceed from cowardice, because one man may frighten ten but not a whole country.

"What monstrous vice then is this," he asks, "which does not even deserve the name of cowardice?—which cannot find a title sufficiently odious?—which nature disowns having created, and the tongue refuses to name?"

There can be very little doubt that before the unsuccessful revolution of Guyenne, in which, as I have shown, even the middle classes joined, and which evidently was directed against monarchy, political discussions for and against a republic were common. The classical writings, suddenly and widely communicated, could scarcely have failed indeed to direct men's minds into this channel; and the more intimate acquaintance with Italy just obtained would naturally assist this result. La Boëtie, says Montaigne, forgetting that his friend was to be a republican only for a burst—in his youth "would rather have been born at Venice than at Sarlat." Venice, indeed, seems to have been the great object of admiration in those times; and this is probably the reason why certain foreign writers, into imitation of whom, from love of the picturesque and the melodramatic, liberal writers have suffered themselves to be betrayed, have always laboured to paint the history of that glorious city in such horrid and repulsive colours.

"The Venetians," says La Boëtie, "are a handful of people, living so freely, that the most wicked among

them would not be a king; and are all so born and bred, that they know no other ambition than to surpass one another in the defence of their liberty. Thus fashioned from their cradle, they would not accept all the other felicities of the earth in exchange for the slightest tittle of their franchises!"

But the spirit of imitation of ancient times or foreign countries is never really the initial reason of a political movement. When Hobbes proscribed the study of the classics, as likely to create anti-monarchical feelings, he forgot that the love of the good and the beautiful is almost always overcome by interest; and did not foresee that Athenian literature might be eagerly studied without producing a single republican, or teaching anything but pedantry and prosody. An opposite mistake has led many high-minded and ardent men to exaggerate the importance of classical studies, which they have thought would stimulate a spirit of liberty. But liberty is always conceived in the womb of long-suffering nations; and the task of intelligence and enlightenment is to bring it forth. How often has this great suffering been endured in vain! How often have we listened in vain for the cry of the infant, and found it dead and motionless, destroyed by the throes that were to bring it into the world!

The idea of getting rid of the monarchy was suggested to France in the sixteenth century, chiefly by the misery produced, evidently by misgovernment and wanton tyranny—and was favoured also by the religious reformers.

The bourgeoisie seem to have perceived a practical method of carrying out their views. At least I have no doubt that the suggestion insisted on by La Boëtie in so varied a manner, that the way to overthrow tyranny was to refuse taxes, was not the product of his brain, but had often been talked of. Indeed the Revolution of 1548 began by an attack on the tax-gatherers—for the people were not yet sufficiently advanced to proceed by legal opposition; as the Parliament men of Bordeaux seemed to have thought possible. "Let us give them nothing," says Boëtie, "and they will dry up and die like trees, the roots of which are deprived of nourishment."

Very practical this for a schoolboy's exercitation! Read, too, the unsurpassed eloquence with which he thunders against the "nations obstinate," who act as "receivers for the thief who robs them, as accomplices of the murderer who kills them, and as traitors to themselves;" and see how it will harmonise with the idea propagated by Montaigne and his imitators, that La Boëtie did not write with the idea attributed to him by those who printed his works at Middelbourg—namely, of subverting monarchy in France. "You sow your fruits, that he may ravage them; you furnish and fill your houses that he may have something to steal; you bring up your daughters that he may slake his luxury; you bring up your sons that he may take them to be butchered in his wars, to be the ministers of his avarice, the executors of his vengeance; you disfigure your forms by labour, that he may cocker

himself in delight and wallow in nasty and disgusting pleasures!" If the man who could write all this was not ready to ring the tocsin, all laws of inference are false; but it would be equally false to see in him an anarchist or lover of disorder. The Revolutionist of one age is often the Conservative of the next.

"We never sorrow for what we never possessed, and regret comes after pleasure. With the knowledge of present evil is mixed the memory of past joy. It is the nature of man to be free and to desire freedom; but likewise it is his nature naturally to preserve the bend which custom has made him take. All things are, in a certain sense, natural to man to which he is brought up and accustomed; but that only is native to which his simple unaltered nature incites him. The first reason of Voluntary Servitude is custom. Just as the most fiery coursers, who at first bite the bit, then play with it; at first rear against the saddle, then wear harness as an ornament, and proudly strut under their trappings; so men say that have always been subject, that their fathers have so lived,—think themselves bound to endure the evil, and gather examples to cheat themselves into this belief; justify their tyrants by appealing to length of possession—forgetting that time, instead of excusing, aggravates injury. There are some, it is true, better born than others, who feel the weight of the yoke, and cannot refrain from shaking it off, who never are broken in to slavery; and who ever, like Ulysses, by sea and land, look out for the smoke of their

homestead: that is, cannot refrain from remembering their natural privileges and bearing in mind their ancestors and their former state. These are they who, with clear understandings and penetrating minds, are not content, like the coarse populace, to look ever down at their feet, but cast their glances over the tract they have passed and over the tract that is before them. They remember things of former times, to judge the things of time to come, and estimate the present. With heads naturally well framed, they have sought improvement by study and knowledge. Even if liberty were utterly lost, quite expelled from the world, these men would imagine and feel it in their souls, aye, and relish it there; and, however daintily servitude may be attired, receive it they will not."

We have here the best description ever written of the learned and enlightened, but not numerous society, which in the sixteenth century thought "Utopia" the most amusing romance ever written; and which, receiving the impression of ancient republican happiness, without paying much attention to the miseries and defects of those small and brilliant but ephemeral societies, contrasted them with the gross and barbarous forms under which they were born, and looked back with wondering regret to what they considered a sort of political Paradise. I conceive that they and their successors, who have endeavoured to cast a rosy hue over ancient republican civilisation, have done ill-service to the cause of liberty. Men do not believe in happiness; or, at any rate, their

happiness is mingled with the idea of contention. He who promises peace speaks for the other world.

All editors and critics of La Boëtie have insisted on the statement that he makes no allusion to his own times. Certainly his work is not what we call a pamphlet. He does not discuss the conduct of kings, ministers, and magistrates. He does not speak of Francis the First and Henry the Second, of the Connétable and the Guises. But there is a constant under-current of allusion to his own age and country —quite as much as was safe at a period when there was no great political party to back him and espouse his cause. La Boëtie, it must be remembered, wrote long before the beginning of the religious wars: he wrote after, and, according to De Thou, under the impression of an insurrection suppressed with the most awful severity—accomplices, and tacit approvers, and lukewarm opponents, being enveloped in the same doom. Yet he does not fear to say: "Who would believe in this baseness, that one man should be allowed to govern a country according to his good pleasure, if he did not see it—if he only heard that such a fact took place in strange countries and foreign lands?"

There are many such appeals to personal experience, which can scarcely be explained by the imitative character of the Treatise. But once, La Boëtie, after detailing the means by which the Roman emperors deceived the people, expressly says: "In our times do not behave much better those who scarcely do any evil, however great, without ushering it in by some fine

talk of the public good and common benefit. For thou knowest well, O Longa, the usual formula, which sometimes they might use with some ingenuity, though for the most part there can be little ingenuity where there is so much impudence."

The whole piece is in the tone, now of a letter addressed to Longa, now of an oration addressed to living people: but this form might be reflected from classical models. How, however, can we explain the vehemence, the personality of his "preaching," as he calls it, if he merely spoke of circumstances thousands of years old? What should we think of a young writer who should thunder out against superstition and idolatry now-a-days in France? Should we believe he made no allusion to Catholicism because he spoke of Pagans only? Evidently, when La Boëtie opposes the Grand Turk to Venice he means France, at that time in alliance with the Ottomans: "The Grand Turk knows well," he says, "that books and doctrines give, more than anything else, to men the sense and understanding to look about them and hate tyranny. I hear that in his territory he has few learned people, and does not want any." This sounds like an allusion to the attempts to repress printing and the spread of knowledge, made by Francis the First when he saw the danger of his dilettanteism.

According to La Boëtie, who arrives at this result by a very subtle process, whatever may be the good fortune mankind can possess the want of liberty makes it without savour. "Yet liberty men do not desire,

it would seem, because if they desired it they would have it." "Be resolved, O people," he exclaims, "no longer to serve; and you are at once free. I do not ask you to push tyranny roughly, or to shake it, but only not to sustain it; and then behold, how like a great Colossus, whose pedestal has been shattered by its own weight, it will topple down and be dashed to pieces!"

But the staple of the Treatise is appeal to insurrection under various forms, or rather incitements to people not any longer to put up with the odious institution of monarchy. In one place the writer admits that he always felt a sort of inhuman joy in reading the misfortunes of Israel, which, without constraint, or any necessity, chose a king; and the concluding sentence of the Treatise is as follows,—something in the spirit of Quevedo:—"For my part I think, and am not deceived, that since there is nothing so contrary to God, so liberal and debonnair, as tyranny, that he has set apart *down there* (in hell) some special punishment for tyrants and their accomplices." La Boëtie feels discouragement now and then in the midst of his enthusiasm; and once implies that he spoke at the wrong time. "Doctors advise that incurable wounds should not be meddled with; and I act not wisely *in preaching on this subject to the people,* which has long lost all consciousness, and whose disease, since it does not feel it, must be mortal." He pauses accordingly in his "preaching," to inquire into the origin of tyranny, and we see that

his speculations, excited by the events his youth had witnessed, and the doctrines inculcated, had some tinge of what is now called Socialism.

The reader will do well to turn to this pregnant Treatise, which may be called the first, as it is the most remarkable production of the revolutionary spirit in modern times. He will find everywhere the evidence of generous feeling and keen intelligence, which more than makes up for the want of moderation, and the apparent absence of a practical knowledge of politics. The theory of La Boëtie is a subversive theory, and as such can be admired by those who enjoy some portion of the felicity he desired, only as matter of history. In estimating it, we must remember that he wrote at a time when souls as well as bodies were under oppression; and that it was an act of wonderful courage to plead for liberty either of soul or body. To do so was to call up enemies, not only in high places but among the rabble.

It is difficult for us now to conceive the gloom that spread over the moral world in those days, the narrowness of the horizon, the leaden weight of the sky. Great must have been the terror of the simple when the vapour overhead began to reel to and fro, and the war of distant conflict in the upper intellectual regions came to their ears. We must endeavour not to be unjust to the populace in the sixteenth century. Save in some out-of-the-way districts—where legends of former liberty remained—the humble, when not goaded by personal suffering, were averse to religious or political

reform; but because it seemed to shock their moral sense, because their teachers instilled ferocious prejudices into their minds. The Eastern story, narrating the struggle of the good spirit with the evil spirit, that had changed a Prince into an Ape, tells how the former assumed in succession shapes even more horrible than the latter; so that he that was imprisoned in the odious form knew not which was friend, which foe. Thus the stupefied Man of the Middle Ages beheld the Reformers who fought for him as hideous monsters. Their end for the most part, too, was the end of the good spirit; but mortally wounded in the struggle, they did not have the satisfaction to see man released, or to taste the balm of his gratitude. Through flames and persecution they sought their reward elsewhere.

This is the saddest sight in the world,—the martyrs of freedom of soul and body perishing with the curses of those for whom they die in their ears. Many, probably, have gone away doubting their own mission, or despising themselves for having loved man. The upheavers of the world are usually blasted with the charge of ambition. They would sack society, forsooth, in order to slake their passions in the hubbub! We have not seen much proof of this. Luxury satisfies its hunger and its thirst best in the vast tranquillity of despotism. Its safe field of action, when hunting up its means, is on the Exchange, where nothing is to be lost but honour, and the lack of that, wealth remaining, never deprived a man of respect. What is there to tempt unscrupulous ambition on the squalid

path of revolt? Success is more than doubtful, always ephemeral, waited on by care, followed by ingratitude. He who undertakes to bring the world into the likeness of his beautiful idea, and expects more than the artist's reward, is a fool. He is sure to be felled by some butcher, or delivered to some hangman, or to be disturbed in his grave by cavaliers in search of ornaments for Temple Bar.

La Boëtie, when he dared to stretch out his hand and shake at the too solid foundations of French Monarchy, was not young enough to be ignorant of this. We must give him the full benefit of his disinterestedness. "The people," he says, "are always suspicious of those who love them, and simple towards those who deceive them." And then he goes on to enumerate the instruments by which tyrants draw people to servitude — theatres, games, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures — all used as baits and deceptions; and tells how, when the Roman Emperors distributed provision, the cleverest and best of the rabble would not have left his bason of soup to recover the liberty of the republic of Plato. Then he adds, in a passage which editors have in part suppressed, because no doubt the memory of Nero appeared to them to be pursued with too obstinate vituperation — to be blackened with an enthusiasm that carried the writer beyond the limits of literary, perhaps political etiquette :—

"I see no one now who, on mention of Nero, does not tremble at the very name of that nasty and filthy

plague of the world; and of this fellow, of this incendiary, of this hangman, of this savage beast, it may be said, that after his death, as odious as his life, the noble Roman people so grieved, remembering his games and his festivals, that they were actually disposed to wear mourning!"

Evidently La Boëtie, in all this, wrote from his very entrails. He hated Nero, true type of kings. He does not flout, or criticise, or abuse him—he scalps him. But when he held this villain in his grasp he wreaked, in imagination, his rage on the living tyrants, inaccessible amidst the pikes and halberds of their guards, and the fiery halo cast round them by popular superstition.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE APPEARANCE OF THE PLEIAD.

In order more clearly to appreciate the career, not only of La Boëtie but of Montaigne himself, and understand the literary influences to which they were subject at the age of impressions, I must here take a rapid view of what was going on in the world of letters in France, under the reign of Henry the Second. As I proceed, the elements of proof as to the date of the Treatise will gather; but it is not necessary to keep this point too much in mind.

Estienne Pasquier,—whom it is good to quote as an eye-witness of the revolution, and an actor, though not brilliant—in his "Researches on France" has a chapter treating of "the great fleet of poets produced by the reign of Henry the Second, and the new form of poetry by them introduced." This reign began in 1547,—a year after the lad of sixteen is supposed to have written; and, so far as literary taste was concerned, remained for some time under the same influences as the concluding years of Francis the First. The

elegant Melin de St. Gelais was the king's almoner—his poet laureate was Francis Hebert. No one as yet suspected the revolution, which had been preparing in silence and retirement. The men who began the reform, says Pasquier, professed rather to content their own tastes than the opinions of the common run of people. The first was Maurice Seve of Lyons, who set up for a mark, in imitation of the Italians, a Mistress named Delia; and fired at her, not in sonnets, "which were not then introduced," but in continual *dixaines*. The honour of introducing the sonnet is usually given to Du Bellay.

Let me observe here, that Melin de St. Gelais, and even Marot himself, had already composed sonnets; otherwise I should be obliged to claim the introduction into France of that neat and complete form of poetry for our La Boëtie, who composed many sonnets long before Du Bellay published a line. It was in his "Illustration of the French Language," published in 1550, (when La Boëtie was twenty years of age), that Du Bellay laid down the doctrines on which the proposed reform was to base itself, and recommended the introduction of the Epigram, the Eclogue, the Elegy, the Sonnet, the Satire, and the Pindaric Ode. Most of these forms, however, had been attempted before.

Contemporary with Maurice Seve was Theodore de Bèze, who composed verses on the accession of King Henry the Second, so pathetic, that they drew tears from Pasquier's legal eyes. Jacques Pelettier du Mans also began to dress French poetry in a new fashion,

and made many innovations in orthography. "That was a fine war," enthusiastically exclaims Pasquier, "which was then undertaken against ignorance! The van was led by Seve, Bèze, and Pelettier. After them came Pierre de Ronsard and Joacquim du Bellay, with Baif, Pontus de Tiart, Jodelle, Belleau, and many others. I myself, about this commencement, brought into light my 'Monophile,' which was favourably received; and in my hours of leisure nothing has ever pleased me more than making Latin verses, or French. All this happened under the reign of Henry the Second. I compare this brigade to the main body of the army. Every one of them had his mistress, and every one aspired to immortality by means of his verses. Yet, alas! some have survived their own books. After the death of Henry the Second, the wars that happened in France on account of religion troubled a whit the water which was drawn from the fountain of Parnassus. However, recovering ourselves somewhat, we produced other poets, whom I shall place among the rear-guard, as Desportes, Scevole de St. Marthe, the two Jasmins, the Seigneur de Pibrac, du Bartas, du Perron, Jean Bertaut; to whom I will not scruple to add Mesdames des Roches of Poitiers, mother and daughter, but especially the latter, who shone as a writer among ladies like the moon among the stars! As to tragedy and comedy, we owe the first introduction thereof to Estienne Jodelle. He wrote two tragedies, the 'Cleopatra' and the 'Dion;' and two comedies, the 'Rencontre' and 'Eugene.' The

'Rencontre' and the 'Cleopatra' were represented before the king, Henry, in Paris, at the Hôtel de Reims, with great applause of all the company, and afterwards at the College de Boncourt, where all the windows were crammed with an infinity of persons of honour, and the court was so full of scholars that even the gateways were jammed full. I speak as one who was present in the same room with the Great Turnebus. As for hymns and heroic poems, such as the 'Franciade,' we owe them entirely to Ronsard, who was not at first appreciated; some saying that he was too great a bragger, some that he was too obscure. He had for enemy Melin de St. Gelais, who belonged to the poets of the reign of Francis the First, and who on account of I know not what jealousy, disgusted King Henry with the productions of the young Ronsard."

This account, which I have condensed from Pasquier, is sufficient for my purpose. We see that some time after the accession of Henry the Second, and about the time when Montaigne began to be an assiduous courtier, a completely new school of poetry arose, and under circumstances so remarkable, that its advent could not escape the notice of a literary contemporary. Any work not containing a reference to the new movement, or some traces of its influence, might safely be rejected as not belonging to the time.

The exact date at which this literary revolution commenced, and attracted the attention of all France, is known. Pierre de Ronsard was born in 1524, of a family of Hungarian origin. He studied a little at

the college of Navarre, then entered the service of the Duke of Orleans, and subsequently, quite as a boy, that of James, king of Scotland. He visited our island a second time in 1540, and after having travelled in Germany and Piedmont, being seized at once with deafness and with love, retired to a life of study at the college of Coqueret about 1542, being then only at most about eighteen years of age. He remained there seven years, preparing himself for a great revolution of the French language, in company with Baif, Belleau, Muretus—"already erudite," says M. Sainte-Beuve (he was only about sixteen years of age)—and Lancelot de Carles, who was a relative of the family of La Boëtie's subsequent wife.

It would be absurd to suppose that before 1546 the first attempts of the new school of poets were already familiarly known in Guyenne; and even if we imagine a correspondence between young De Carles and La Boëtie, or conversations with Muretus, when he came to profess at the college of Bordeaux, this will not be sufficient to explain in the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude the allusions to the triumph of the revolution in poetry. M. Sainte-Beuve, in his elegant life of Ronsard, expressly says that the retirement at the college of Coqueret lasted until 1548 or 1549. It was not until the former year that Ronsard met and formed a friendship, in an hôtel between Poitiers and Paris, with Joacquim du Bellay, then tormented by poetic conceptions, to which he had not given birth, and who had been studying law at

Poitiers. Ronsard was not then celebrated: he had not published a line. The new friends talked of poetry, and determined to join in a crusade against the old naïve and vulgar forms. It is good to observe, that the precise character of Ronsard's proposed reforms and productions was at this time so secret that even Du Bellay, in order to become acquainted with them, was obliged to resort to theft. There was a quarrel between the two friends on this account, and even talk of an action at law.

Du Bellay got the start of Ronsard, and published before him in October 1549. His "Illustration of the French Language" did not appear until February 1550, and his "Olive" not until the end of the year, when the first poems of Ronsard were printed. Baif—who was actually younger than La Boëtie (not much more than fourteen when the Treatise is supposed to mention him as a reformer of French poetry!)—entered the field as a poet afterwards, and the real victory of the new school did not take place until towards 1552 or 1553. How naturally the following sentences, which occupy a prominent place in the Treatise of La Boëtie, would come from the pen of a young writer about 1553:—

"I think that those kings who have taken advantage of religion to be wicked will receive due treatment *down there*. Our kings scattered in France all sorts of things, as toads, fleurs-de-lys, the ampoule, and the oriflamme—all which, for my part, I will not disbelieve, because neither we nor our ancestors have hitherto had occasion to disbelieve; for we have always

had kings so good in peace, and so valiant in war, that although they be born kings, it would seem that they have not been made like the others (that is, like all other kings) by nature, but chosen by the all-powerful God before their birth for the government and preservation of this kingdom; and even if all this were not so, I would not on that account enter the lists to debate the truth of our histories, nor examine them too keenly, lest I should deprive of good material our French poetry, just now not newly accoutred, but it would seem entirely renewed by our Ronsard, our Baif, our Du Bellay, who, by so doing, have so advanced our language that I dare hope that soon the Greeks and Romans will little surpass us, except in priority of time. And certainly I should much wrong our rhyme—a word I am fond of using, as not displeasing to me, though some have made the art mechanical, for I see that many are at work to ennoble it, and restore it to its primitive honour—I should be very wrong, I say, to deprive our rhyme of those fine stories of King Clovis, which already, methinks, I see wonderfully well handled in the 'Franciade' which Ronsard is composing. I know his reach; I know his keen mind; I know the grace of the man. He will make as good use of the oriflamme as the Romans did of their ancilia and their bucklers cast down from heaven. He will manage our ampoule as well as the Athenians did the basket of Erichthone; he will cause our arms to be talked of as much as the 'Olive,' which they still maintain to be in the temple of Minerva.

Verily I should be audacious, indeed, to contradict our books, and meddle with the matter of our poets."

This passage, so full of grave irony directed against French monarchy, and against fables which were at that time universally believed, contains its own date better than if it was expressed in figures;—after the revolution in French poetry effected by Ronsard, Baif, and Du Bellay; that is, after 1551—before the publication of the 'Franciade;' that is, before 1557. The only way of avoiding this demonstration is to suppose that La Boëtie wrote the sketch of the Treatise much earlier, and made additions afterwards; but this would also contradict Montaigne, who professes to know his friend to his heart's core, and says that having once written it, he never looked at it again. In my opinion, it is not important to decide how soon La Boëtie began to be a reformer in politics, or a revolutionist, but it *is* important for his reputation to point out that he remained so until he was a grown man, and that the eloquent work which has arrested our attention so long contains not the opinions of a schoolboy, but the opinions of an aspirant conseiller in the Parliament of Bordeaux. It is just possible that the ironical tone substituted for the declamatory tone in the passage I have quoted may indicate a riper mind and cooler passions; but, whatever hypothesis we form, what I have said of the attempt made by the friends of La Boëtie to conceal his political opinions remains untouched.

I shall not here do more than hint at a very in-

teresting subject of discussion,—whether, whilst the great monarchies of Europe were beginning to knit, it would have been possible for an enlightened minority to give public opinion another direction, and spare the world three hundred years of oppression, and revolt, and wars for mere family objects. The Republics of Italy were, it is true, disappearing; but this may have been solely on account of the corrupt neighbourhood of the Papacy. On the other hand, the prosperity of Switzerland may be explained by its poverty. Two very Republican, or, I should rather say Liberal, elements had, however, been infused into Europe—the Reformation and the Revival of Classical Learning, which, in fact, created modern Society. The Dutch, who have been pursued ever since with a ridicule that we do not, perhaps, trace to its origin, were the first after the Renaissance to experiment in free institutions; but circumstances enabled them to apply doctrines and theories which in every country had disciples among the educated and industrious. A history of that great intellectual movement should be written without monarchical prejudices, but without revolutionary enthusiasm. It would be seen, that in the sixteenth century the Monarchy was to some extent the Tribunate of the ignorant rabble; and that the middle classes then first withdrew their sympathies and interest from the courts, and began to entertain ideas of reform, which during three hundred years have seldom been triumphant, except as a compromise. Perhaps, after all, La Boëtie was not so unpractical when he made himself the Preacher of the

doctrine which has been the leaven of modern times. The echo of the tocsin that rolls along his sentences vibrates to our hearts even now; but in this island, where we reap the advantage, the response is Gratitude. It is not our fault if everywhere else the response is Fear.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### LA BOETIE AT PARIS, AND AS A LATIN POET.

In an anecdote which I have already quoted from D'Aubigné, mention is made of some early visit of La Boëtie to Paris. Like all other young gentlemen in the sixteenth century, he was of course introduced to the Louvre. I doubt whether a single instance could be found of a country squire remaining in his own district in those days without an occasional visit to the capital, to do homage to the king or admire the beauties of the new buildings. When we talk of the increased locomotion of our modern times, we must not forget that it has chiefly benefited commerce, and is facilitating the emancipation of the humbler classes from the deadening influence of home—so fatal to the development of high faculties, so dear to the affections when we have found out the vanity of life. But noblemen and gentlemen of old went abroad to note manners and survey realms. They repaired personally from time to time to the great mart of civilisation and thought which spontaneously starts up in the centre of every

country. Down in their châteaux, in the absence of the press, they were compelled to depend for news on the vague rumours of a credulous public, or the chance visit of some trusty friend.

La Boëtie never became in strict terms a courtier, whether he was disgusted by the heavy halbert on his toes or not. He preferred his quaint little city of Sarlat, his Castellet, or, better still, his retirement in the wild and solitary Medoc, out amidst the Landes towards the rustling shores of the sea. Duty forced him at seasons to dwell in busy Bordeaux, and literary tastes sometimes, and sometimes, doubtless, his friendship for Montaigne, led him to Paris. Here he seems, with so many other worthy and dignified persons, to have courted and been patronised by the infamous Cardinal of Lorraine. One of his Latin poems is addressed to the Muses from the celebrated grotto at Meudon, and contains a description of the winding course of the Seine, and the distant view of Paris. We feel that it must have been written on the spot.

A word on the Cardinal of Lorraine. I am willing to judge mercifully many historical personages whose principles I detest, and who stand boldly up for their portraits with innocent blood upon their hands. Fanaticism, ignorance, prejudice, even obscure whisperings of interest, are reasons for indulgence to those who feel themselves not perfect. But this hypocrite, this persecutor of the saints in whose doctrines he believed, for the behoof of a church which he despised, this dark intriguer, this nudger-on of the gross and

fraudulent conspirator, whom history, stunned into acquiescence by the vociferous applause of the Church, has consented to call the Great Guise—this incarnation of evil cannot be excused or defended by any in whom the moral sense remains intact. How melancholy is it, then, to reflect, that to his palace at Meudon all that was wise, and learned, and brilliant in France, flocked—whilst Rabelais, resting from his labours, laughed in his sleeve in the parsonage below—that Ronsard and the Pleiad, that Montaigne came to do homage, that our La Boëtie, his lips still vibrating with denunciations of tyranny, fed at the board and walked in the gardens of this mean prelate!

But the mind of France at that time was in a chaotic state; and as the most contradictory principles found place side by side, so did the most opposite characters associate. There was, as it were, a civil war in every man's breast. No complete body of doctrine of any kind existed. There were republicans opposed to free examination in religion; there were great religious reformers, who argued in favour of passive obedience; there were stanch Catholics, who learned to preach regicide; there were philosophers ready to burn heretics, and heretics ready to burn each other. Society, in fact, was in a state of complete dissolution.

In La Boëtie's Latin poems we find allusions to many events of his time, which, if we were to judge as history usually judges, we could scarcely suppose to have come from the same man—at any rate from the

author of the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude. He congratulates, as a good patriot, Henry the Second on the retreat of Charles the Fifth after the destruction of Hesdin and Terrouane in 1553; and in a curious piece intended for the tomb of Jean Gontaut de Biron, his friend, who died in prison, after haying been taken wounded at the battle of St. Quentin in 1557, from the ill treatment inflicted by the Count de Mansfeldt, he predicts the ruin of Philip the Second. One of his poems, singularly enough, is an attack on the great Guise for his expedition into Italy, and a general ridicule of his exploits—even the taking of Calais. The importance of the latter event was not appreciated at all in the sixteenth century, except by the Spaniards and their allies in France, the Guises. It is, however, curious to find, that so far back as then the utility of Calais, Boulogne, and the neighbouring ports for an invasion of England, was insisted on as seriously as it has been of late; and De Thou, in a Satire, clearly shows that French flat-bottomed boats and galleys were intended to co-operate with the Armada. La Boëtie, led away by his hostility to the Catholic and persecuting party, naturally ridicules all these intentions; but soon after, as I have said, we find him at Meudon, and one of his last poems is a sort of complaint for the very great Guise whom he had previously satirised. Perhaps, by the influence of Montaigne, the opinions of La Boëtie were modified.

We learn from the Latin poems the names of many of La Boëtie's friends. Besides the pieces addressed to Montaigne, there is one to Belot, for whom he seems

to have had a particular affection; one on the tomb of Martial Belot, the father; one to La Chassagne, afterwards the father-in-law of Montaigne; one, as I have said, to Pommier; another to Marguerite Laval; another to Jean de Maumont, to whom Amyot's translation of Plutarch had been attributed; others to an obscure advocate named Bontan; to a Chaumont; to Guy Brassac, on the death of J. C. Scaliger in 1558; and an epistle to the same Scaliger, to whom Brassac had sent some of La Boëtie's verses, and who had praised them highly.

In 1562, an edict in favour of the Protestants was promulgated by the influence of the Chancellier de L'Hospital. The Parliament of Bordeaux was violently opposed to it, and refused at first to register it. The Parliament of Paris never registered it at all. Thereupon some disturbances arose between the Catholics and Huguenots, and La Boëtie wrote memoirs on the subject. These memoirs, probably narrative mixed with reflections, remained in manuscript, and were suppressed by Montaigne. It is difficult to decide in what spirit they were written. At that time monarchy was apparently on the side of toleration, and was contending with the Parliaments. Did La Boëtie suppress his theoretical convictions, and support the seeming good intentions of monarchy? I hope so. Yet I should not be surprised if this fiery patriot, incapable from his position of properly appreciating the importance and justice of toleration, were proved to have maintained the freedom of Parliament against

the violence of the king; and whilst recommending mildness towards the Protestants, have condemned them as disturbers of the public peace; men who interfered by their turbulence with the great projects of civil liberty he had formed!

It is certain, however, that we do not possess a full knowledge of the views and intentions of La Boëtie; and have a right to complain that Montaigne, who professed to know them all, did not communicate them in a clearer manner. He would have served the reputation of his friend better; but perhaps he might have done injury to himself—a mighty consideration for a friend! We are reduced to guess the steps that separated the Treatise, with its turbulent appeal to the revolutionary spirit, its ardent democratic aspirations, from the discouragement and melancholy of the Latin address to Belot and Montaigne, in which, abandoning all hope of regenerating his country, he calls on them to freight an earlier "Mayflower," and take refuge with him in America. Perhaps, if death had not been too swift, the circumstance that prevented him, as Cromwell and Hampden were prevented, from emigrating, might have given time for the development of a more martial spirit. These mighty discouragements of great minds are often but lulls before the tempest. No one who carefully reads the history of the sixteenth century, can doubt that there was a point when it would have been possible, with the assistance of classical fervour, to have founded a republic as in the Netherlands. Had La Boëtie lived, he might have been the Washington of

his age. The praises of Montaigne and his contemporaries were either trivial rhetorical exaggerations; or have that signification, and no other.

But I must give the piece entire:—

### To Belot and Montaigne.

"O Montaigne, equitable judge of my mind! and thou, O Belot, whom antique candour and faith adorn! you, O my friends, my companions, my care! you, whom the anger of the gods and cruel fate have condemned to live in this sad time, what say ye? what are the dictates of your heart?

"For my part, one idea only is present in my mind —that we should fly on the paths of Fortune, and escape on steeds, or in vessels, from our abandoned hearths.

"And so will I do if you see no more useful work, and if the possibility of exile yet remains.

"How wretched and how sad! Yet still I think it necessary to pay a long and lasting adieu to our native country. We are witnesses of its ruin: why should we any longer trample on the ashes of our sires? Since I cannot assist my country, I will spare my eyes the sight of her discomfiture. It would have been better, perhaps, to fly whilst she was yet tottering than now she is utterly destroyed. Let us not regret, however, that as devoted citizens we have paid her the last offices of duty. To have done so is, at any rate, a consolation, though sterile.

"Already the less favourable divinities counselled

us to fly, when they revealed to us towards the west countries until then unknown, and when mariners navigating the vast ocean discovered unpeopled tracts, empty empires, another sun, and new lands, with other stars sparkling in another sky.

"Doubtless the gods, when they resolved to devastate Europe by war, and changed the aspect of our fields deserted by labourers, prepared a New World for the people to fly to; and this is the world which now, in this age, has risen out of the sea.

"There we are told the earth shows scarcely any sign of inhabitants; the light soil waits for the crooked plough, and having as yet produced nothing, asks for cultivation. There boundless fields acknowledge the first-comer as lord, and become the property of the man who tills them.

"There lies our path! Out with the sail and the oar! From that distant shore I shall not see, despairing, thy agony, O France! I shall not see thee throw up thy arms to the angry gods! There, far from civil war, I will choose an abiding-place, and as a sad stranger will cultivate my humble domains. There, with you, O my friends, whatever place be allotted to me, I will take refuge from my country's ruin. But still the spectacle of its grief and its melancholy countenance will haunt me, and neither reason, nor age, nor the vast sea flowing between, will weaken my sorrow. Troubled by this alone, in all other matters tranquil, certain never again to behold my domestic hearth, I shall be ready as an exile on distant shores to work out

my destiny, whether the sadness of a foreign clime shall oppress me to early death, or whether Fate shall still lengthen out my days."

In order that we may appreciate the importance of this invocation, we must remember that Montaigne always spoke of La Boëtie as the greatest man of his age—"who would have produced the greatest effects if Fortune had so willed it;" and yet, who, though "one of the most proper and necessary men" for the highest offices in France, had all his life "remained despised amidst the ashes of his domestic hearth." It was not, therefore, as a translator or as a poet, not even as a political writer, that La Boëtie appeared to his friends, but as the fated arbiter of public affairs. "If he had lived," says Montaigne somewhere, "he might have been useful in appeasing our discords." Perhaps the sight of the apparently irremediable disorder of France, and the thought that he had no part to play in such an age, may have made La Boëtie less attached to life.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE LAST MOMENTS OF LA BOETIE.

The friendship of La Boëtie and Montaigne had lasted about six years. In that brief time they had each travelled round the other's mind, and exchanged all the emotions of which their hearts were capable. Even without accepting all the classical grief of the Essay on Friendship, we still feel that we are in presence of two men who clung to each other during life with a potent embrace, and could not be cloven asunder without suffering. That is a strange image that Montaigne suggests, when he says, that the arms of friendship, however long, cannot overstretch the fissure between this and the other world. I think I see some of the fantastical figures of Blake catching at each other with elastic limbs.

The narrative of the circumstances attendant on the death of La Boëtie, is contained in a very long letter addressed by Montaigne to his father, and supposed to have been written immediately afterwards. It was not published, however, for nearly ten years; and bears

many marks of careful composition and patient study. Its tone, indeed, is so pathetic and sustained—I may say, in parts so classical and even pagan—that it seems written under the inspiration of the Phædo of Plato, and here and there recalls that most moving of all tragedies.

We must observe, that in this special work, of which I shall make a compressed translation in a respectful spirit, Montaigne admits the immense importance he attached to the last words of La Boëtie; and says that he was so convinced that something worthy of record would come from his lips that he kept a careful watch. However, his memory was short, and troubled also by the sadness of the scene. "To paint him as he appeared, thus proudly checked in his career, and bring to your eyes that invincible courage in a body beaten down and stunned by the furious assaults of death and pain, would require a much better style than mine; for even when full of health, when he discoursed on grave topics, he spoke so that it would be difficult to equal him in writing; and yet in that last emergency his wit and his tongue seemed to vie one with the other which should best perform its last services. I never saw him so full of fine thoughts, nor of such eloquence, as during that illness." Montaigne then says, that he set down many common and light phrases, because such, spoken at that crisis, are a singular testimony of a soul possessed by repose, tranquillity, and assurance.

"I was returning from the Palace (of the Parlia-

ment) on Monday, the 9th of August, 1563, when I sent to him to come and dine with me. I got word from him that he thanked me, but that he felt a little unwell, and would be pleased if I came and spent an hour with him before he started for Medoc. I went to him soon after dinner, and found him lying down in his clothes, with already I know not what change on his face. He said that he had taken cold as he was playing (at tennis) in his pourpoint under a silk gown, with Monsieur D'Escars; and that he had often been ill in a similar manner from the same cause. I thought it right that he should carry out his intention of going away; but advised him not to go farther that evening than Germignac, which is only two leagues distant from the city. My reason for wishing him to leave was, that the place where he lodged was surrounded with houses infected by the plague. He had some fear of that disease, as he had just returned from Perigord and the Agenois, where it was very prevalent. Besides, for a similar disease to his, I had once found horse-exercise good. So he set out with Mademoiselle de la Boëtie his wife, and Monsieur de Bouilhonnas his uncle.

"Next day, very early, one of his people came to me from Mademoiselle de la Boëtie, saying that he had been taken bad in the night with a violent dysentery. He wanted a doctor and an apothecary, and begged me to go too, which I did in the afternoon.

"When I arrived he seemed quite rejoiced to see me; and when I wished to say good-by and go away,

promising to return on the morrow, he begged me, with more affection and earnestness than he had ever exhibited, that I should be with him as much as possible. This greatly touched me. Nevertheless, I was going away when Mademoiselle de la Boëtie, who had a presentiment of something evil, begged me, with tears in her eyes, not to stir that night. Thus she prevented my going, at which he expressed delight. Next day I came back, and returned to him on the Thursday. His disease was becoming worse, and he grew gradually weaker.

"On Friday I left him again; and returning on Saturday found him very much cast down. He then said that his disease was somewhat contagious, and moreover that it was unpleasant and melancholy, that he knew my temperament, and begged me to be with him only by fits and starts, but as often as possible. *From that time forward I never left him.* Up to Sunday he had said nothing of what he thought of his state, and we only spoke of the particular incidents of his disease, and what the ancient physicians had said thereon. Of public affairs we talked very little; for I found him disgusted with them from the first day. But on Monday he had a great swoon; and on coming to himself he said he had seemed to be in a confusion of all things, and could see nothing but a thick cloud and obscure mist, in which all was pell-mell and without order; yet that in this accident there was no unpleasantness. 'Death has nothing worse than that,

my brother,' said I. 'It has nothing so bad,' he answered.

"From that time forward, as he had been deprived of all sleep since his illness, and as no remedy, not even those used at the last extremity, had any effect, he began to despair entirely of his cure; and communicated the same to me. That very day, as it was thought advisable, I said to him, that it would ill become me, on account of the extreme friendship I bore him, if I did not care to see him continue to act as prudently in illness as he had always done in health; and that, if God willed he should grow worse, I should be very grieved if for want of warning he left any of his private affairs unsettled, both on account of the damage his parents would incur and for the sake of his reputation.

"He took this in very good part; and after having turned the matter over in his mind, begged me to call his uncle and his wife alone, that they might hear what he had determined as to his will. I said that he would alarm them. 'No, no,' said he, 'I will console them, and give them much better hope than I have myself.' Then he asked me if his swoons had not a little alarmed us. 'They are nothing, my brother,' said I, 'and commonly happen in such diseases.'— 'Truly, no, they are nothing, my brother,' answered he, 'even if they lead to what you most fear.'— 'That would be only happiness for you,' replied I; 'but the injury would be to me, in losing the com-

me; so that whatever I have I owe to you, who are my true father. Therefore I have no power to dispose of anything unless you give me permission.' He remained silent then, and waited until the sighs and sobs that burst forth subsided and enabled his uncle to answer.

"La Boëtie then addressed his wife:—'My Likeness,' he said,—for thus he often called her—'having been joined with you in the sacred bond of marriage, which is one of the most respectable and inviolable which God has ordained here below for the maintenance of human society, I have loved, cherished, and esteemed you to the utmost of my power, and am assured that you have returned an equal affection, for which I cannot be too grateful. I beg you to take that part of my goods which I give you and to be content, although what I bestow is little compared with your deserts.'

"'My brother,' afterwards said he to me, 'my brother, whom I love so dearly, and whom I had chosen from among so many men, to renew with you that virtuous and sincere friendship, the use of which by the triumph of vice has for so long been removed from among us, that only some old traces remain in the memory of antiquity—I beg of you, as a testimony of my affection, to be the heir of my library and my books, which I give you. This is a very small present, but it is heartily bestowed, and is appropriate on account of the affection you bear towards letters. It will be to you *μνημόσυνον tui sodalis.*'

"Then, speaking to all three generally, he thanked

God for that, being in such an extremity, he was surrounded by the persons who were dearest to him of any in the world. It was fine, he said, to see an assembly of four so united together in perfect friendship. Having recommended us one to the other, he pursued: 'Having now settled my worldly affairs, I must think of my conscience. I am a Christian and a Catholic: as such have I lived, and as such I am determined to close my life. Let a priest be called, for I would not fail in this last duty of a Christian.'

"La Boëtie," continues Montaigne, "finished his discourse, which he had carried on with such assurance of countenance, such force of language and of voice, that whereas I had found him, on entering his chamber, feeble, slowly dropping his words one after the other, his pulse low, death striving to approach, his visage pale and livid, it seemed now that as if by miracle he had resumed his vigour, a more rosy countenance, and a stronger pulse. I made him feel mine, to compare the two together. At that time, however, my heart was so full that I knew not what to answer. But two or three hours after, partly to maintain that great courage, partly on account of the care which I always had, all my life, for his glory and his honour, and wish that there should be more witnesses of his magnanimity, I said to him when the room was full of people, that I had blushed for shame that I had failed in courage to listen to what he, being in that state, had had courage to speak; that until that time I had scarcely believed that God ever enabled

us thus to surmount human accidents, or given credit to what history told of such cases; but that, having now been convinced, I was thankful that the example had been given by one who loved me so much, and whom I so much loved, and should know how to act when my time came.

"He interrupted me to exhort me to behave as I said I would, and to show that we did not carry our maxims merely in our mouth, but engraved on our heart and soul, to be applied when needful. This should be the result of study and philosophy. Taking my hand, he added: 'My brother, my friend, I assure you I have done many things in my life with as much pain and difficulty as this one. And when all is said, I have been long prepared, and know my lesson by heart. Is it not enough to have lived to the age I have reached? I was about to enter my thirty-third year. God has been so gracious, that my life up to this time has been full of health and happiness. This could scarcely last, seeing the inconstancy of human things. I should have had to set in earnest to business, and to see a thousand unpleasant things, and to bear the inconveniences of old age, from which I am now quit. Moreover, it is probable that I have lived up to this time with more simplicity and less of cunning than I might perhaps have done if God had let me live until the idea of getting rich and making myself comfortable had entered my head. As for myself, I am certain that I am going to God, and to the regions of the happy.'

"As I showed, even in my face, the pain his words gave me, he exclaimed: 'What, my brother! you want to frighten me! If I were afraid, who should reassure me but you?'

"Towards evening the notary came, and when the will was drawn out I went and asked La Boëtie if he would sign it. He replied that he would not only sign it, but compose it himself. For a time, however, he felt he was too weak. Then, recovering himself, he said that at the hour of death people must not be idle, asked if the notary had a rapid hand, and soon after dictated his will so fast that he could with difficulty be followed. When it was finished, he begged me to read it to him, and then said, speaking of his property: '*Sunt hæc quæ hominibus vocantur bona.*' When the will was signed, the room being full of people, he asked me if it would do him any harm to speak. I said 'No,' if he spoke gently.

"Upon this he called Mademoiselle de Saint Quentin, his niece, and said that he had perceived the goodness of her nature, thanked her for her kindness and attention to him during his illness, exhorted her to piety, without which could be no virtue, to filial reverence, to aversion for pleasure, and especially from immodest playfulness with men, which, harmless at first, by degrees corrupts, and leads to laziness and vice. 'Believe me,' said he, 'the surest guardian of a girl's chastity is severity.' After this he called Mademoiselle D'Arsac, the daughter of his wife; told her that he had cared for her affairs and for those of her brother as if they had

been his own, and that he needed not exhort her to virtue, because the very name of vice was, he knew, abhorrent to her.

"Every one in the chamber wept and lamented, but not for this did he interrupt his discourse, which was long. Afterwards he wished everybody to retire, except his garrison, as he called the girls who attended on him. Then calling my brother, De Beauregard, he said: 'I thank you much for the sorrow you show on my account. Will you allow me to say something which I am called upon to say to you?' My brother having answered in the affirmative, he pursued: 'I swear to you, that of all who have applied themselves to the reformation of the Church, I have never thought that any set about the work with more zeal, and a more entire, sincere, and simple affection than you; and I believe that you were only incited to do so by the vices of our prelates, which have, doubtless, need of great correction, and by some imperfections which in the course of years have crept into the Church. It is not my desire at present to move you from your position, for I do not wish to beg any one to act against his conscience; but I wish to warn you, that from respect for the good reputation which your house has acquired—good God! what a house must that be from which none but honest men have come!—from respect to the will of your father—that good father, to whom you owe so much—of your uncle and your brother, you should avoid the extremities to which you go. Be not so harsh and

violent. Fit yourself better to your family. Don't separate yourself; join with them. What ruin those dissensions have introduced into this kingdom! what greater ruin they will yet introduce! As you are prudent and good, take care not to distract your family in this way, for fear of tarnishing the glory and the happiness it has until now enjoyed. Take in good part, Monsieur de Beauregard, what I tell you, and as a testimony of my friendship for you. I have put off saying this until now, thinking that the state in which you see me must give more weight and authority to my words.' My brother thanked him very heartily.

"On Monday morning he was so ill that he had lost all hope of life; so that when he saw me he called out piteously, and said: 'My brother, have you no compassion for the torments I suffer? Do you not see that all your help only prolongs my pain?' Soon after he fainted away; and we thought at first that he had gone, but he was brought back by vinegar and wine. But for a long time he could see nothing; and hearing us crying around him, he said: 'O God, who torments me in this way? Why am I deprived of the pleasant rest I was enjoying? Leave me, I pray.' Then hearing me, he said: 'You, too, my brother! Will you not let me be cured? What comfort you deprive me of!' Then, having recovered himself a little, he asked for a little wine. This restored him somewhat, and he said to me it was the best drink in the world. 'No, truly,' said I, to make him talk; 'but water is.' 'True,' he replied, quoting Pindar,

'Ὕδωρ ἄρισον.' By this time all his extremities, even his face, was chill, and a cold sweat passed over his body: no pulse scarcely could be found.

"In the morning he confessed to his priest; but, from want of something that had been forgotten, mass could not be said. But on Tuesday morning he asked for it; and afterwards, when the priest was bidding him adieu, he said to him: 'My spiritual father, I beg humbly for the prayers of you and those of whom you have charge;' and again made profession of attachment to the Catholic religion. Whilst he was speaking he uncovered his shoulder, and, although he had a valet near, requested his uncle to cover him, saying to me: '*Ingenui est cui multum debeas, ei plurimum velle debere.*'

"Monsieur de Belot came to see him in the afternoon; and to him he said, giving him his hand: 'My good friend, I was quite ready to pay my debt, but have found a good creditor who has released me.' A little while after, waking with a start, he exclaimed: 'Well, well, come when it may, I am ready for it!' —words he often repeated. Then, when some one was opening his mouth by force to make him swallow something, he said, turning again to Belot: 'Is life worth all this?'

"Towards evening he began in good truth to draw towards death; and whilst I was supping, sent for me. He was now but the seeming of a man; yet he contrived to say: 'My brother, my friend, would to God I could realise the imaginations I have just had!' After

having waited some time, during which he did not speak, but sighed much, I asked: 'What are they, my brother?' 'Great, great,' he replied. 'There never was a time,' said I, 'when you did not honour me by communicating all the imaginations that came into your mind. Will you not let me still enjoy the same privilege?' 'It is my wish that you should,' he answered; 'but, brother, I cannot. These are admirable, infinite, beyond expression!' He paused then, for he was quite exhausted. A little before he wanted to speak to his wife, and said, with as gay a countenance as he could put on, that he would tell her a story. Endeavouring to go on, his strength failed, and he asked for a little wine. This had no effect, for he swooned at once, and remained long in that state.

"When death was very near, hearing the lamentations of Mademoiselle de la Boëtie, he called to her, and said: 'My likeness, you torment yourself too soon. Will you not have pity on me? Take courage.' After many more soothing words he suddenly said: 'But I am going.' This was because he felt faint. Then, fearing he had alarmed her, he said: 'I am going to sleep; good night, my wife: go away!' This was the last farewell he took of her. When she was gone, 'My brother,' said he to me, 'keep close by me, if you please.' Afterwards, feeling the nearer attacks of death, or stimulated by a medicament that was given him, his voice increased in power, and he moved violently in his bed; and every one began to have some hope, for it was of weakness he was dying. Then,

among other things, he began to beg me over and over again with extreme affection to give him a place; so that I thought his mind was wandering, and even gently told him that he was giving way, and that these were not the words of a man in full possession of himself. But he did not give in at first, and repeated with greater energy, 'My brother! my brother! do you then refuse me a place?' I was obliged to appeal to his reason, and convince him that since he breathed and spoke and had a body he occupied a place. 'True, true,' answered he at last, 'I have one; but that is not the one I want: and then, after all, I have no longer any being.' 'God will give you a better one soon,' said I. 'Would I were there already,' answered he. 'For these three days I have been panting to depart.' After this he often called out to know if I were near him. Then he began to rest a little, which confirmed us in our good hopes; and I went out of his chamber to rejoice with Mademoiselle de la Boëtie. But about an hour afterwards, naming me once or twice more, and heaving a long sigh, he gave up the ghost, about three o'clock on Wednesday morning, the eighteenth of August, fifteen hundred and sixty-three, having lived thirty-two years, nine months, and seventeen days."

I do not wish here to disturb the solemn effect of this narrative of the death of a great and good man in the hired room of some hôtel at Germignac; but it is impossible not to notice that amidst all his friendship and devotion, real as they were, Montaigne paints

himself, no doubt with an unerring pencil, as behaving in a pedantic and self-absorbed manner that irresistibly creates a smile. La Boëtie, in his agony, calls out for a place—perhaps the place in history that has been given him—and his friend at that moment cannot refrain from rebuking him with scholastic arguments! But it is not necessary to make a commentary on these peculiarities, which harmonise entirely with whatever else we know of Montaigne's character.

What became of the works of La Boëtie will appear further on, and his name will constantly recur in the following pages. He ever remained as present with Montaigne, in death as in life; and without any wish to depreciate the sincerity of the Essayist, I may even say that his friendship appears to have deepened and taken a higher tone when he took up his pen and began to write. The chapter on Friendship is a noble work, and almost everywhere throughout the Essays, when La Boëtie is alluded to, we are touched and our sympathies are aroused. It must be confessed, however, that Montaigne, with the hearty relish of existence which he long preserved, makes an unjustifiable appeal to our feelings when he implies that ever after La Boëtie's departure "he dragged on a lingering existence;" that his life was but smoke, but a dark and wearisome night; that his pleasures even redoubled the loss of his friend; that all the rest of his life would be "employed in performing his obsequies," and so forth. I should have preferred

reading the touching inscription which M. Jouannet appears to have seen in Montaigne's library to the memory of La Boëtie, but which has been effaced. We are not, however, in want of most genuine testimonies to his long-enduring grief. The following simple note in the journal of his visit to Italy, performed nearly twenty years afterwards, is especially interesting:—"M. de Montaigne was suddenly seized with such painful thoughts of M. de la Boëtie, and it was so long before he came to himself, that it did him much harm."

## CHAPTER XX.

### MARRIAGE OF MONTAIGNE.

As I have already said, soon after the death of La Boëtie, Montaigne, to escape from his melancholy, chose a new mistress! This circumstance seems to clash with the idea we are accustomed to frame to ourselves of his excessive and tragic grief: but he declares, that had he not adopted some such remedy he might have perished or gone mad. His temperament was in want of a vehement diversion; and so, by art and study, he contrived to fall in love with a person whom, as usual, he does not name or describe. His time of life was favourable to the success of the experiment. Love relieved him from the suffering that friendship had caused.

This is an episode that may be lightly passed over, with the remark that Montaigne, hastening to return to the dissipation from which the wise words of La Boëtie had withdrawn him, as soon as the lips which uttered those wise words were cold—and persuading himself and posterity that it was necessary for his

health—exhibits himself as an odd mixture of hypocrisy and simplicity: yet let us pause before we call him a hypocrite, or a fool—for of such inconsistencies are we all made.

I once thought that the lady towards whom Montaigne directed the attachment from which La Boëtie had fled, might have been Françoise de la Chassagne, who in due course became his wife. But Françoise was not so fortunate as Marguerite de Carles. Montaigne's marriage, of which we have now to speak, was purely one of convenience and family arrangement. He pretends, indeed, that he was married against his will; that he was pushed on—possibly by his father, not approving his way of dissipating sorrow. Of his own accord he would never have thought of it. But this is when, in a licentious mood, he is commenting certain verses of Virgil; and just after he has declared that willingly he would not have married Wisdom herself. However, we may suppose that having reached the age of thirty-three, and not having as yet consented theoretically to Aristotle's rule, or found out that fine reasoning against the neighbourhood of parent and child in years, he married without much pressing, in order to comply with what he himself calls "the custom and usage of common life." It is worth while noting here, that there are no greater slaves, even now, of the proper and the conventional, than these terrible French sceptics and Frondeurs of established institutions and received ideas. I know men, too, nearer home, who, though in perpetual insurrection, if you will believe

them, against all moral and religious laws, yet move meekly on athwart the cross-currents of life, under the yoke of propriety, and are ever nervously anxious about what their neighbours and the parson will say.

It is curious that uncertainty should long have existed as to the date of Montaigne's marriage. Some of his biographers say 1564, and M. le Clerc says 1566,—"I know not on what authority," writes Dr. Payen, with his usual amusing contempt for the statements of his adored Montaigne himself.

"I was married at the age of thirty-three," is the philosopher's own statement, which evidently suggests the date given by M. le Clerc. If Dr. Payen's new discoveries be authentic, however, we must fix the date of the marriage at September 23, 1565; that is to say, two years after the death of La Boëtie—a brief interval, which we regretfully discover was filled up by an amourette.

Among the papers of one Destivals, notary of Bordeaux in the sixteenth century, have been found two contracts of marriage of Michel de Montaigne. The first is annulled, although signed by the greater number of the persons present, even by the couple themselves. As Pierre Eyquem's name does not appear, it has been supposed that he objected to some of the clauses of the contract and refused his signature.

The bride, as I have said, was Françoise de la Chassagne, and was chosen from a Parliamentary family. Pierre Eyquem, thinking that his son would continue

to pursue a legal career, laboured to increase his connexions of that kind.

Joseph, the father of Françoise, was a conseiller, and related to the President La Chassagne, whose conduct at the time of the insurrection of Bordeaux gave such great offence to the Court. One of his sons, M. de Pressac, was gentleman in ordinary of the king's chamber. He himself is said to have been one of the most renowned members of the Parliament. He gave seven thousand francs with his daughter as a dowry. After the marriage took place, Montaigne seems to have continued to reside either at the château or in his father's house at Bordeaux.

All through the Essays we meet with reflections on the character of women as members of a household, which may be partly taken as a sort of revenge for the deprivation of liberty to which Montaigne was subjected against his will, partly as a sort of philosophical protest against temporary annoyances which his Françoise—whom he vainly endeavours to exalt into a Xantippe—caused him, and which he perhaps dared not resent in any other way. Debauched humours such as his were not fit for marriage. He was not steady enough! "Marriage is like a cage: those birds that are inside desire to get out, and those that are out want to get in." Imagine our easy-going Montaigne in the character of the Starling! Oddly comparing himself to Cato, he says: "That great Cato, like ourselves, was disgusted with his wife as long as she was his." He was apt to depreciate what

he possessed and to exalt the possessions of his neighbours; as, for example, in the case of his wife.—"There are not good women by dozens."

"However licentious people may think me," says Montaigne, "I have in truth observed the laws of marriage more severely than I ever promised or hoped." It is not necessary to examine how literally this piece of gratuitous information is to be taken. I shall only observe that Montaigne, more clearly, as far as I know, than any preceding writer, lays down the theory of marriage as it prevails in France, even among the highest and purest minds. "A good marriage," he says, "refuses the company and conditions of love, and endeavours to represent those of friendship. It is a gentle way of social life, full of constancy and confidingness, with an infinite number of useful and solid offices and natural obligations. No woman who has savoured the taste thereof

('Optato quam junxit lumine tæda,')

would wish to stand in lieu of mistress to her husband. If she is lodged in his affections as wife, she is much more honourably and surely lodged. When he is carrying his emotions and attentions elsewhere, ask him to whom he would prefer that an insult or a misfortune should happen—to his wife or to his mistress—and be sure of his answer in a healthy marriage."

We must take care to point out where this Breviary of the Worthy, as the Essays have been called, deviates

from true morality. Here we have it taken for granted that the married man may or must have a mistress; and the ideal of modern French society is set before our eyes. As for Montaigne's simple observation about the respect preserved for the wife, whilst the passion is reserved for the mistress—except where this respect is a form of self-love—I do not believe in it. In real life, the wife under such circumstances degenerates into a victim or a drudge. The woman Montaigne talks of as submitting to her husband's esteem, whilst morally and in every other way deprived of his love, is a monster of his imagination. I am sure that the wives of practical philosophers of his school take care practically to protest against this ludicrous division.

Certainly the ideal of love is seldom or never obtained in a marriage. There are always shortcomings and disappointments. But this is so throughout life; and why abase the Ideal? Montaigne himself for a moment, perhaps, dreamed the bright dream of love in marriage which we all cherish when young. He regrets repeatedly, at any rate, that the nature of woman is so weak as to be incapable of the higher efforts of friendship. Otherwise, he says, the allurements of beauty being superadded to the allurements of intellect and virtue, the most perfect example of union would be exhibited. I am glad to have an opportunity of quoting one of Montaigne's refcrences to the Ideal which his experience had destroyed. "As for marriage," he says, in his Essay on La Boëtie,

after alluding to the intrigues with which he diversified his friendship, "besides that its entry only is free, and its duration is constrained and forced, depending on something else besides our will, and that it is an agreement contracted with other views, a thousand things interfere to interrupt in it the course of a keen affection, whereas friendship has nought to do but with itself. But, in addition to this, the truth is, that women are not commonly capable of that communion on which this sacred attachment depends; their souls are not firm enough to withstand the embrace of so tight and lasting a bond. Otherwise, if there could be achieved a free and voluntary association, in which not only our souls should taste this complete enjoyment, but our other nature also — in which, I say, the whole man should be interested — it is certain that friendship would be more complete; but that sex has hitherto given no example of reaching such a height." Montaigne refers to the authority of the ancient schools, but I have no doubt that here and elsewhere he draws general conclusions from his own unfortunate experience. In all these observations there is constrained emotion, totally apart from the tone of raillery against women which the sixteenth century had inherited from the middle ages.

In those times marriage was almost always a matter of convenience; and Montaigne goes so far as to admit, as a true Frenchman and Catholic was bound to do — some of the most glorious love-marriages on record took place during the Huguenots in those days — that,

after all, he approved of the method of conducting marriages by third hands, and not allowing love or preliminary affection to interfere in the slightest degree. According to his almost invariable mode of treating a subject—seeing only one side at a time, and avoiding all compromises and balancings, the true opposite of the critical way—he says that people do not marry for themselves, but for their posterity, for their family; that the use and interest of marriage concerns our race much more than it concerns us. So that, according to this odd style of reasoning, we take wives for the sake of our grandchildren, and, therefore, must not be so improper as to mix up love with this "prudent bargain," as Montaigne calls marriage. Still further carried away, he declares it would be a sort of incest to do so; and then goes on to repeat certain medical absurdities which he remembered, and which came to the support of his marvellous care for posterity—in theory. What that care was in practice, we shall presently see.

It is good to observe, before we come upon philosophic ground, in these comparatively unimportant—I mean unabstruse discussions—the peculiar way in which Montaigne reasons, or rather allows his imagination to carry him away, substituting prejudices and first impressions for principles. This is almost always his mode of proceeding; and no one can be familiar with his style of writing, or at all on his guard against sophism, without being aware that he seldom really derives a conclusion logically from premises laid down, but seizes the imaginations that rise thicker and faster

as his mind gets into play, and sometimes sets down the most solid truths in the most brilliant language, and sometimes, in language equally brilliant, communicates the most absurd notions and the most trivial theories and deductions.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE PARLIAMENT OF BORDEAUX.

Between the marriage of Montaigne and the death of his father—an interval of about five years—very few incidents present themselves for record. Yet we know that this was one of the most active periods of his existence. It must be remembered that he was still a magistrate. After the death of his friend, and especially after his marriage, which no doubt prevented him for a time from following the Court, he became more assiduous than before in attending to his duties as Conseiller. This, therefore, will be the best opportunity of sketching briefly his connexion with the Parliament of Bordeaux; and alluding to the incidents which troubled France whilst it lasted, and which chiefly influenced him at a subsequent period in breaking his connexion with the public life of the time, ceasing to be an actor, becoming an observer, and preparing to appear on the scene again, to deal with or observe the working of the elements he had in part prepared.

It is necessary here to guard against an impression

which is likely to be conveyed to whomsoever does not accept my words in their plain and narrow sense. Although Montaigne, almost from the time he left college until he was near forty, was constantly and actively mixed up in public life, although he followed the Court and sometimes joined the royal camp, and was in daily communication with the most remarkable men of the time, we must not conceive him as a great diplomatist or a great soldier. He was neither one nor the other. But he was a gentleman of good position, full of talent and powers of observation, disinterested in character, sufficiently vain to be fond of associating with and giving advice to great people, and very anxious not to spend his time more than was absolutely necessary in the insipid duties of a magistrate. There is a tradition that about this period Montaigne was employed to negotiate a friendship, or the making up of a quarrel, between the Duke of Guise and the King of Navarre. But my researches have ascertained no detail.

I have already mentioned the time at which Montaigne first joined the Cour des Aides of Perigord, and ultimately the Parliament of Bordeaux. He became a member of the latter in consequence of a royal edict incorporating the Cour des Aides wholesale in the Parliament. This edict was resisted at first by the Parliamentarians of Bordeaux, who refused to admit their brethren of Perigueux on equal terms. They declared that the new conseillers should not appear voluntarily at the assemblies of the chambers, but should only come when called for. At that time Mon-

taigne, young and ardent, and under the influence of his father, was sufficiently interested in the dignity of the body to which he belonged to join it in making a demonstration against the pretensions of the Bordeaux Parliament. He and his colleagues presented themselves at the chambers without being summoned; the court ordered them to retire; they refused; there was a great dispute; and it was only several months afterwards that the new conseillers gained their point.

The magisterial career of the Essayist runs parallel with many of the incidents I have previously related. Montaigne was a conseiller of Bordeaux when he was at the siege of Thionville, when he followed the courts of Henry the Second, Francis the Second, and Charles the Ninth, and during the whole time of his friendship with La Boëtie; and, as we shall presently see, at his father's death. In short, he belonged to the Parliament during thirteen years. There are, it is true, very few traces of his personal action; and it would, perhaps, be unjust to make him responsible for the iniquitous acts committed by that body, both before and during the first religious troubles. We may even refer to the impressions of disgust produced in him at that period against the barbarous legislation of his country—so barbarously applied—both his ultimate retirement from legal life, and his distrust of human prudence and sagacity.

M. Victorin Fabre eloquently describes the oppressive and passionate justice of the time, its obscure forms, its cruel acts; and denounces the monstrous and

barbarous laws of the sixteenth century; the insane decrees, the punishments worthy of cannibals, in which were used the gibbets, the stakes, the wheels, the wedges, and the iron clubs that inspired Montaigne with so much horror;—I mean in after-life; for no one can have observed attentively the course of human affairs, and suppose that amidst the excitement of action we can ever keep our minds apart and sit in judgment on what passes around us. We are only warned that actions are admirable or detestable by certain secret and spontaneous movements of the conscience, which are generally stifled. If we could suppose that Montaigne saw the doings of his contemporaries as we see them, we should shrink with horror from him for having called some of them his friends. But, in reality, we ought to be surprised only at the vigorous manner in which, as soon as he stood aside, he disengaged himself from the prejudices of his age, and condemned actions whilst he absolved men. It would be a great mistake, however,—one which confounds all sane judgment of the Essayist,—to suppose that, because his opinions are apparently moderate, he was not capable of passion, even at times of the most generous indignation.

Montaigne evidently thought the legislation of his age barbarous and monstrous. What he says about attacking the practice, not the principle, is merely a concession to his legal and magisterial friends: for he clearly lays down that the law in France was not only unjustly applied but unjust in principle. He

relates a curious story illustrative of the horrible pedantry of the bench in his day. A man was condemned to death. His innocence was afterwards proved by the confession of the real criminals. Yet the judges met and decided that execution must take place, for it was better to sacrifice an innocent man than endanger respect to law. The man was accordingly hanged!

In 1560, a trial that came off at Toulouse caused great excitement in the south of France; and Montaigne appears to have made a journey expressly to be present at the debates. At any rate the fact was so isolated that, when afterwards writing of it, he supposes it to have taken place during his childhood or youth; unless he exaggerates purposely in order to make his want of memory, on which he is insisting, more remarkable. The facts are related by De Thou, in his "Universal History;" by Pasquier, in his "Researches;" and were made the subject of a special work at the time by Jean Corras, the famous jurisconsult.

One Martin Guerre, having been married for about ten years to Bertrande de Roltz, in the town of Artigues, abandoned his country for some reason and went to take service in Spain, where he remained twelve years, until the battle of St. Quentin. During the last eight years his wife had received no news of him; but suddenly a man presented himself, in appearance, manners, and knowledge of intimate particulars, so completely the counterpart of Martin, that Bertrande accepted him as her husband, and all relatives received

him unhesitatingly. The impostor was named Arnaud Tillier, or Du Tilh, and both De Thou and Pasquier gravely suggest that the means by which he succeeded were magical. Bertrande and he lived some time very comfortably together; but at last he began to spend money too rapidly, and suspicions pointed by interest were aroused. A soldier passing by reported that Martin had lost a leg at the battle of St. Quentin. It seems evident to me that the wife, however much she may have been deceived at first sight, had become an accomplice until misunderstandings arose. She then accused Arnaud before the Seneschal of Rieux, who, in a most expeditious manner, apparently without witnesses or grounds of any kind, condemned him to death. Arnaud appealed to Toulouse, and a long trial took place, during which the opinion of the public and the Parliament remained in suspense, or varied backwards and forwards between the accusers and the accused. The false husband knew so much, and defended himself so well, that he would probably have been acquitted, had not the one-legged Martin Guerre suddenly appeared in person. Even then Arnaud would not give in, maintaining that the new-comer was the impostor, not he. However, in September 1560, he was condemned to ask pardon of God, the King, Justice, Martin Guerre, and Bertrande de Roltz, with a torch in his hand, in the Parliament House; then to repeat the same ceremony before the porch of the principal church of Artigues; and was afterwards hanged and burned. It is worth observing, that Mon-

taigne was not at all convinced of the justice of the sentence, or rather of the guilt of Arnaud. He enters into no detail, but probably meant that Bertrande, as I have hinted, and as Martin himself believed, was never really deceived; for he had no faith in magic, and it was as a magician that Arnaud was executed. De Thou pretends that the man had served with Martin, but Pasquier says that they had no knowledge of each other.

We find innumerable other allusions and anecdotes in Montaigne, to say nothing of contemporary memoirs, which justify his dislike of legal proceedings in his time. But what chiefly offended him was probably the fact that the Parliament of Bordeaux was essentially Catholic and intensely persecuting. An extraordinary scene had ushered in its proceedings against the Protestants. Two young men, much beloved and respected in Bordeaux, had embraced the new doctrines. They were brought for trial before the Parliament. Conflicting opinions were expressed. Some were for instant execution; but a voice—we may feel sure it was that of Estienne de la Boëtie—was raised in favour of humanity. Let these boys, it said, be confined for six months, and given time for study and reflection. But the bigots howled and raved; and a majority decreed death, and death by fire. The stake was planted in the principal place of the city, and the fagots were heaped around it. Windows, and balconies, and housetops, and the wide square, and the adjoining streets, and the branches of trees,

were thronged with spectators, who wished probably to see "how a Christian could die!" A strong guard occupied various points. The victims were bound, the wood was lighted, the flames began to rise, the shrieks or the prayers of the victims were stifled by the halleluiahs of ferocious monks and the stormy hum of frenzied curiosity. Suddenly the whole assembled population of the city felt some strange presence around them. The Avenging Angel seemed to hover in the air. Fear seized simultaneously on all. A horrid cry of despair arose; and the people began to fly in all directions, as if an enemy had beaten in their gates. Window, and balcony, and housetop, and the wide square, and the adjoining streets, and the branches of the trees, were suddenly deserted. The guards likewise abandoned their posts. Cravens and caitiffs hid from the wrath of heaven in caves. The souls of Monier and De Cazes departed in anguish, amidst a vast silence and a terrible solitude.

After Montaigne became a member of the Parliament, Pierre Feugère, a merchant of the city, was sentenced to the stake, being accused of defacing some images of Christ and the Virgin. This was the first time these little images were set up, in France, at the corners of streets and elsewhere. As lamps or lanterns were burned near them through the night, the custom led to the lighting of the streets; but at first they were a means of persecution, being placed by furious Catholics who lingered in the neighbourhood on the watch for Huguenots, and who scarcely

ever failed to mob or murder people who passed without saluting their idols. Pierre Feugère may have broken the images to revenge this monstrous oppression exercised in the name of Unity.

The Edict of January, 1562, brought about chiefly by the Chancellier de L'Hospital, put an end for a time, and in some degree, to persecution. I have already mentioned that La Boëtie's last work was a memoir on the troubles caused by this edict. We are not informed which side he took, but as there was a contest on this occasion between the Parliament and the royal authority, people, knowing his republican opinions, have supposed that he must have supported Parliament and fanaticism against royalty and toleration. But there is really no likelihood of this; and the fact that Montaigne afterwards dedicated some of La Boëtie's works to L'Hospital, author of the edict, suggests on which side his pen was employed. La Boëtie's last known public act is a mission, in company with M. de Burie, the mild and moderate governor of Bordeaux, to Agen, to induce the Huguenots to give up to the Dominicans of that place a convent which they had seized.

The Parliament of Bordeaux not only refused to verify the edict of January for a long time, but when it had done so, passed many measures, the tendency of which was to nullify it. Among other strange acts it voted, July 1562, that all its members, and even the meanest officers about the court, should make a public profession of Catholic faith in presence of the Arch-

bishop of Bordeaux. Montaigne, therefore, was obliged to go through this formality; and it is specially noted that he did so. We learn, also, that "Michel de Montaigne, conseiller in the Parliament of Bordeaux, came and made his reverence to the court and Parliament of Paris, and pronounced his profession of faith like the others, in order to have a deliberative voice at the audience of the court, at which he was present, June 12th, 1562."

As I have said, Montaigne cannot be made directly responsible for the acts committed by his corporation, and his condemnation of them was marked and energetic, though enveloped in general words. The real beginning of the religious wars at length came, and the Parliament, still intolerant, gave considerable trouble to the agents of the king, by its constant intermeddling with political affairs. In 1564 the Catholics murdered during the night a number of defenceless Protestants, and the magistrates, by not attempting to punish this crime, showed that they approved it.

In 1565 took place the progress of Charles the Ninth to the south of France, undertaken by the Court in order to prepare the massacre of the St. Bartholomew. During this progress, in which bloody intentions were concealed under festivals and rejoicings, Bordeaux was visited, and the Chancellier de L'Hospital, who had not yet discovered that he was the dupe of the Guises, and was used by them and the queen-mother to give a semblance of rectitude to the Court, was delighted at the opportunity of delivering a

moral discourse to the licentious and fanatical Parliament. We do not know whether the chancellor was already a friend of Montaigne, or whether their friendship began on this occasion. At any rate, it is certain that Montaigne deserved some of the reproaches which were addressed to the body collectively, and the principal of which I have already alluded to.

We have full details of all the ceremonies that took place on this occasion, and know how the city made great preparations to receive the Court; how, in order to fit it for such visitors, the magistrates were ordered to be unusually severe, and purge the place of all vagabonds and evil-livers; how provisions of all kinds—hay, straw, barley, wheat, and wood—were gathered; how it was ordered, in contempt of political economy, that everything should be charged only a reasonable price; how the Jurats were instructed to have the paving mended, and sand strewed in the streets where the royal party was to pass; how the members of the court who were unprovided with scarlet robes were requested to communicate with their tailors; and how it was decreed that all conseillers should attend in full dress, and leave off for the nonce their loose habit of going about the streets in dressing-gowns! The reception was as grand as a city reception could be, and the only disagreeable incident that occurred was that the young king was terribly bored by the long speech of Jacques Benoist, the President, and actually cut him short. M. Grün, to whom no portion of Montaigne is uninteresting, suggests that

he must have been among the conseillers who were present on horseback at the entrance of the king, and as they waited a long time, is fearful that our sympathies may be too keenly excited. He therefore quotes diverse passages from the Essays to prove that Montaigne was accustomed to the saddle, so that we may reserve all pathos for another opportunity.

The effect of the chancellor's admonishing speech, or rather violent scolding, was not very effective in repressing the fanaticism of the Parliament, which even during the king's residence in various ways resisted measures favourable to the Protestants. Very little modification, indeed, took place in their conduct up to the time when Montaigne ceased to be a member of their body. They openly encouraged Frederic de Foix, the Marquis de Trans, one of Montaigne's relatives, and other lords, in carrying on a sort of private war against the Reformers; and, in fact, on every occasion showed that the idea of toleration had never presented itself to them.

We have very little information on the part played by Montaigne in the Parliament. Contemporary writers inform us that he was a distinguished magistrate; and a tradition exists that he was particularly remarkable for the luminous equity with which he drew up reports. M. Grün represents him as already possessed of all the manners and ideas of the Essayist, talks of his calmness amidst the passions of his colleagues, and so forth; to which Dr. Payen replies by describing a scene in which, during a dispute between the Par-

liament and M. D'Escars, the king's lieutenant in Guienne, Montaigne, accused among others of having rendered himself "contemptible," by accepting too many invitations to dinner—carried away, says the report, by the vivacity of his character—had a discussion with the President, spoke violently, left the court in a passion, was recalled and made to explain his words, and altogether acted like a man interested even in the smallest details of the business of his corps.

I think, therefore, I am right in inferring that we should not strive to recognise the Essayist in all the acts of Montaigne, either as a courtier or a magistrate. This is not the place to describe the laborious creation of the theory of toleration; but I think it will be conceded by every one that that theory, though preached, not practised, by Luther, was very imperfectly understood even by the best minds in France before 1570. The toleration of L'Hospital was the toleration of a lawyer. He did not approve of proceeding against heretics by massacre or any irregular means; and, being a prudent and cold man, took every opportunity of proposing some half measure, under cover of which the Huguenots could have lived safely. But although he was one of the conspirators in the celebrated affair of Amboise, he long afterwards consented to serve as the blind of the Guises and Catherine de Medici. As we have seen, we cannot even decide whether even La Boëtie was tolerant. There is, at any rate, no reason whatever for supposing that Montaigne, member of

a persecuting body, a friend of the principal and most active Catholic chiefs, was at all awake at this time to the real atrocity of the acts that were passing around him — I mean, awake to the extent of feeling our modern repulsion for those who committed, or a troubled conscience for having participated in them. I have no doubt that, with most of the lawyers and the majority of France at that time, he thought heresy an irregular, disagreeable thing; but he had also a natural benignity of disposition, and an aversion to blood. To the assistance of his humanity came the fact that his brother, Beauregard, was one of the converted; that many of the most virtuous men he knew were on the Protestant side; that L'Hospital was at any rate favourable to all toleration consistent with State ideas. But at that period of his career we must not suppose him even a sceptic, still less that higher character who is capable of belief, and of pardoning others for believing differently.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE TRANSLATION OF RAYMOND DE SEBONDE.

About 1567 there happened a remarkable accident in the intellectual life of Montaigne. Despite the example of his friend La Boëtie, he does not seem, up to this time, to have practised the art of writing, except, perhaps, as a pastime or an exercise. His life had been one of pleasure and business, of adventure, and routine occupation. It was spent in palaces or law-courts, in cities, on roads, even in camps, amongst soldiers, jurisconsults, gentlemen and ladies, virtuous or otherwise. He seems to have played the subordinate part in his friendship with La Boëtie, to have admired what the other wrote or spoke — to have hung upon his lips as a bee upon a flower;— but during all this time his experience was spreading over a vaster circle every day, his judgment was becoming firmer and more loftily seated, and he was learning, if not to write, yet to speak, growing familiar with the springs of human action, practising how to

touch them, watching their play—educating himself in wisdom before he dreamed of making others wise.

The hint of action came from his father. Pierre Eyquem's house, from the time of his return out of Italy, had always been a place of learned resort. The worthy knight, hearing the praises with which the air was filled of Francis the First, for his patronage of letters, determined to imitate him as well as his means would allow, and spent much care and money in seeking the acquaintance of studious men. He received them under his roof as if they were sacred characters, particularly inspired by Divine wisdom, and picked up their sentences and remembered their discourses as if they had been oracles. "His respect," observes his son with quiet humour, "was in equal ratio with his ignorance; for neither he nor his predecessors were remarkable for learning. I, too, like letters very well," adds Michel, "but I do not adore them."

Among the visitors at Montaigne, as we have previously seen, was Pierre Bunel. He came during the boyhood of Michel, and stayed some days with Pierre Eyquem, who had many guests of the same kidney. On going away he made a present to the master of the house of a book entitled "Theologia Naturalis, sive Liber Creaturarum Magistri Raimondi de Sebonde." The object of the writer was to prove by human arguments, not only the existence of God, but the necessity of faith in revealed religion, and even to base what are called mysteries on reason.

The book was, indeed, a sort of Catholic "Reasonableness of Christianity." "Sebonde's object," says Montaigne, "is bold and courageous; for he undertakes, by human and natural reasons, to establish and verify against the atheists all the articles of the Christian religion, in which, to say the truth, I find him so firm and so happy that I do not think it possible to manage the argument better, and believe that nobody has equalled him." The book was written, we are told, in a hybrid tongue, a sort of Spanish with Latin terminations; and as Pierre Eyquem knew Spanish as well as Italian, his friend thought, that with a little assistance he could make it out. "It is a useful book," said he, "and useful for the season in which we live." That was about the time when "the new ideas of Luther" were beginning to acquire credit, and "to shake in many places the ancient faith." The comment that Montaigne makes on the recommendation of Pierre Bunel, sounds so extraordinary, as proceeding from a man whom we are accustomed to hear called The Sceptic, that I cannot refrain from quoting it.

"Pierre Bunel was led by reason to foresee that this commencement of disease (the Reform) would easily decline into an execrable atheism; for the vulgar, not having the faculty of judging of things in themselves, being led away by chance and appearances, when it is suggested to them to despise and criticise the opinions they once extremely respected—as, for example, those on which their sal-

vation depends—and when some articles of their religion are shaken and made doubtful, they soon feel a similar uncertainty about all the other pieces of their belief which were not more firmly established than those which are unsettled, and shake off as a tyrannical yoke all the opinions they have received by the authority of laws or respect of ancient custom;

('Nam cupide conculcatur nimis ante metutum;')

undertaking thenceforward to receive nothing to which they have not given attention and particular consent."

Some of these phrases may probably be taken as purely precautionary; and it is possible that Montaigne —disdainful of faith himself—may have thought it advisable to keep the common people Catholics, or any rate religious. But I have no doubt that the general impression they leave is nearly correct. Montaigne asserted his right to set himself face to face with Catholicism and supernaturalism, and deny it and criticise it, and scoff at it; but he would not allow any one to modify its doctrines. Few men whose mental education has been Catholic—whether they affect to throw off the Catholic yoke or not—can see any point of repose between blind acquiescence in the Church and utter rejection of all its doctrines. They have been prepared for this by the teaching of their masters, who are eager to maintain that there is no evidence of divine truth but the affirmation of infallibility. As soon, therefore, as a Catholic thinker

begins to exercise the faculty he calls Reason — which, in utter ignorance of the constitution of the human mind, he has been taught to consider as opposed to Faith — his progress towards complete disbelief or denial, which is not the same thing, is rapid indeed. Every young man who leaves the Church becomes an accomplished infidel at once. He has no doubts, no scruples, no anguish of soul — at any rate, that he will admit. He comes out of the lobby of Faith and goes into the lobby of Reason, and cries "No," while others cry "Aye," that is all; and fancies he has made wonderful progress, and flings up his heels, pricks his ears, and scampers about rejoicing, all in the vain imagination that, by a sort of "Hey-presto!" touch, he has been converted from a Christian into a philosopher, knowing the causes and the forms of things; whereas in reality he is nothing but a Papist running about with his coat turned inside out, and perfectly prepared to let the priest turn it back again on his death-bed. Montaigne, with more gravity and purpose, much resembled the young truant I have described. He, too, but almost with complete consciousness, because he thought the material comfort of the world might be influenced thereby, came out of the visible Church, skirmished against it, pointed out its weak sides, laboured to take down its pride, and break open its gates; but he always kept up connexions with the folks inside, and crept back by a postern when danger threatened. I meet many men, even now, more or less in the same intellectual

position; and own that I cannot assign a high degree of gravity or earnestness of character to people who are so merciless in treating their hopes and those of others. If they were the victims of free examination, the result would be more varied. Granting that the perfection of human reason is to discover that there is no God to take an active interest in human affairs, no chance of immortality for the soul; as human reason does not exist in perfection in every man, I think, if they were in any sense of the word *free*, they would arrive at varied conclusions, and that we should find them here and there on the infinite plain between the affirmative and the negative. But when they leave one camp they fly rapidly, obeying irresistible attraction, towards the other, flouting as they pass the Protestants, who, earnest and sad, are establishing their locations here and there, but in one vast colony, that has its various states and uncertain borders, and who do not torment themselves about unity here below, satisfied that their glances, no matter from what point of the vast circle of the intellectual universe they proceed, must centre in a single point, which is God.

When Pierre Eyquem received the work of Raymond de Sebonde from Bunel, he does not seem to have been prepared to relish it. But a short time before his death—some days, says Montaigne, in his vague way—he found this book under a heap of forgotten papers, and "commanded his son to do it into French." His curiosity had probably been stimulated by reading an

abridgment by one Jan Martin, published in 1551, and erroneously attributed to Eleonore, sister of Charles the Fifth.

"It is pleasant," observes Montaigne, "to translate authors like Sebonde, in whom there is scarcely anything but the sense to reproduce; whereas those who have given much pains to the grace and elegance of language are dangerous to undertake, especially if we attempt to turn them into a weaker idiom. This occupation was very strange and very new to me; but happening at that time to be at leisure, and being unable to refuse anything to the requests of the best father that ever lived, I set to work and did the business as well as I could."

Pierre Eyquem was so pleased with his son's work, that he insisted on having it printed; and his desire was complied with after his death. Montaigne appears to have gone to Paris to do his translation; and having concluded it, wrote a dedication to his father, by a singular coincidence, on the very day of that father's death, viz. June 18, 1568, if we can be sure we know the real date. Dr. Payen most singularly supposes that the choice of this date was arbitrary, and intended, by a sentimentality that can only be appreciated by a bibliographer, to testify respect for the deceased; but he could not have noticed that Montaigne concludes by wishing his father a long and happy life, a piece of unfilial irony in which he is not likely to have indulged. The dedication informs us, that in obedience to Pierre's commands, which had been expressed the previous

year, his son had "cut out and worked up, with his own hand, for Raymond de Sebonde, that great Spanish theologian and philosopher, a French dress. In doing this, in as far as was in his power, he had divested him of the savage mien and barbarous deportment he formerly possessed, and made him presentable in good company;" that is, he had almost entirely rewritten him. It *is* singular, that after this statement no editor should have thought of including the translation in a complete edition of Montaigne's works. La Boëtie's translations are preserved as carefully as his originals. Every one would thus be able to compare the progress, not only of Montaigne's language, which he even then admits to have had a Gascon flavour about it, but of his style and of his mind; for it is impossible to reconstruct a work on such a subject without putting much individuality into it. It is worth noticing that the Abbé Laborderie rather jesuitically made up his book, on the Christianity of Montaigne, chiefly of extracts from this translation. There is no trace in the dedication of the sceptical tone. Montaigne talks of Sebonde's "excellent and most religious discourses, his lofty, and, as it were, divine conceptions;" and it would be merely gratuitous to see anything like irony and doubt in this. I shall be compelled further on to say something about the influence of this treatise on Montaigne's mind; and here, therefore, merely indicate when he became familiarly acquainted with it, and point out its effect in first inducing him to use his pen on serious subjects.

As to Raymond de Sebonde, or Sebon, or whatever the name may be, people seem to be very doubtful about his history. He is said to have professed medicine, philosophy, and theology at Toulouse, about 1430, and his work is supposed to have been printed for the first time in 1487. If the reader wishes to have his mind thrown into a perfect state of bewilderment and confusion, let him consult Dr. Payen's letter on the subject to M. Gustave Brunet. But the life and bibliography of Sebonde form no part of my subject. What Montaigne says, despite the vagueness of his dates, is sufficient for our purpose. "This work seemed to me too rich and fine for an author whose name was so little famous, and of whom all we know is that he was a Spaniard, who professed medicine at Toulouse about two hundred years ago. I formerly asked Adrien Turnebus, who knew everything, what the book might be. He replied, that he thought it was as it were a quintessence derived from Saint Thomas d'Aquinas; for, in truth, that mind, so full of infinite erudition and of admirable subtlety, was alone capable of such imaginations. At any rate, whoever be the author or inventor,—and there is no reason, except on better grounds, to deprive Sebonde of this title,—he was a very sufficient man, with many fine parts."

Montaigne's translation of Sebonde was first published in 1569. A second edition appeared in 1581, after the publication of the Essays, which doubtless drew new attention to the work, until then forgotten.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### DEATH OF PIERRE EYQUEM, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THE sudden death of Pierre Eyquem left Michel in a position to obey his secret inclinations, though it did not make much difference in his worldly position. He signed "Michel de Montaigne" in addressing his father, and probably had for some time managed the property; but being a most respectful son, and observant of parental wishes, he seems to have concealed his distaste for the legal profession, even after the death of his elder brother. Pierre Eyquem was evidently formed by nature for a civil life. All his tastes were turned that way. What a passionate love he had for the government of his domestic affairs! He was the model of a good old country gentleman, fond of peace, and learning, and agriculture, and yet interested in municipal business. When elected mayor of Bordeaux in 1553, obeying a maxim he had heard, that it was the duty of a citizen to abandon private for public affairs, though age had begun to weaken him, he left his château and took up his abode once more in the capital of the pro-

vince, and attended to the business of the city with the same ardour as he attended to the direction of his own farms. Afterwards he appears to have remained principally at Montaigne, where at length he was afflicted by the stone, which, having caused him to suffer dreadfully for seven years, brought about his death, as I have said, in 1568. He left eight children,—five sons and three daughters. Their names were as follows:—Michel, seigneur de Montaigne; Thomas, seigneur de Beauregard; Pierre, seigneur de la Brousse; Jeanne, married to M. de Lestonnac; Arnaud; Leonor, married to M. de Camein; Marie, married to M. Cazelis; and Bertrand Charles, seigneur de Mattecoulon. The last and Beauregard survived the other brothers, and lived till towards the end of the century, and Leonor was still living in 1602. The mother of Montaigne survived her husband many years, residing at the château during the life of her son, and afterwards at Bordeaux, where she died in the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Biographers usually make Montaigne to have given up his place as conseiller at the death of his elder brother, by which they would imply that he did not at once become the head of his family, in 1568. But, in fact, his elder brothers had died some time before. One of them, known as Captain St. Martin, commanding a band of footmen called the regiment of Sarlabous, at the age of twenty-three was playing at tennis, and was struck by the ball a little above the right ear. He did not sit down or leave off playing, but five or six hours after-

wards died of apoplexy. This occurred in 1565, at Condom.

Pierre Eyquem was lord of Montaigne and Balbeyron, for which he did homage to the Archbishop of Bordeaux. His possessions included also the fief of La Brousse, the noble house of Beauregard, an estate in the Isle of Macau, near the Bec d'Ambès, and the estate of Marrous, afterwards called Mattecoulon. This extensive property was divided by will among the children. As for Montaigne, who got the principal share, he afterwards made some additions to his possessions, and we know that he died worth ninety thousand francs; that is, thirty thousand francs of floating capital, and sixty thousand francs in land. His regular revenue was about six thousand francs. When the estate went out of his family, in the beginning of the present century, it brought only double what it was worth in the sixteenth century; that is, a hundred and twenty thousand francs: but in thirty years more it was estimated at two hundred and twenty-four thousand francs; and was recently advertised for sale, estimated at above half a million.

Between the years 1568 and 1570 we almost lose sight of Montaigne. In 1569, we know that he published the first edition of his translation of Raymond de Sebonde. It met with great success, and was read by both sexes eagerly. Many persons, however, and especially women, seem to have been a little scandalised by an attempt to reason on Christianity, and came to Montaigne to have their doubts solved. The many

conversations he had, ultimately gave rise to the famous "Apology for Raymond de Sebonde." With this exception we know nothing of Montaigne's movements at this time. It is not likely that he continued to attend much to his duties as conseiller, which had become more and more irksome to him. In the following year, indeed, he determined to abandon law altogether; and an entry in the registers of the Parliament informs us that on July 24, 1570, the king accepted the resignation of the office of conseiller made by Michel de Montaigne in favour of Florimond de Raymond. This Florimond was author of a furious Catholic pamphlet, called "The History of Heresy," and was considered a clever Latin poet in those days. His name constantly occurs in the collections of epitaphs called "Tombs," which used to be published as pamphlets on the deaths of eminent people, or at the end of posthumous works. We hear of him disgracefully shortly after his nomination, as demanding the exhumation of some young Protestant girls who had been buried in a Catholic cemetery.

I will observe, as an additional reason for Montaigne's retirement from the office of conseiller, that nearly all the Parliaments had recently made themselves very odious on account of the injustice they had exhibited in the trials of Protestants. This injustice was so evident, that at the peace concluded just after Montaigne's resignation, it was stipulated that the Protestants should never be tried by the Parliament of Toulouse at all, and that they should have the right of

challenging four conseillers in each class of the Parliament of Bordeaux, without assigning any cause. From this time forward the Parliaments utterly lost their reputation, and were deserted by public opinion in their attempts to struggle with royalty. Montaigne, therefore, rightly chose his time for "assuming the sword;" that is, becoming a mere gentleman, and giving up all connexion with law.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MONTAIGNE'S EDITIONS OF LA BOETIE.

For some time before Michel de Montaigne's resignation of his office of conseiller, he had been engaged in a labour of love. Having begun his literary career, and a sort of connexion with the booksellers, by means of the translation of Sebonde, he determined to collect and publish all the works of his friend La Boëtie which contained nothing of a dangerous character. Had he really been an industrious friend he would have performed this duty long before, and not waited for the spread of the civil war to render the appearance of the Treatise on Voluntary Servitude inopportune. He is obliged to say, speaking of this Treatise and the Memoirs on the Edict of January: "As for these two pieces, I think their fashion too delicate and elegant to expose them to the gross and heavy air of so unwholesome a season." This expression, which evidently supposes the Memoirs to have been equally revolutionary with the Treatise, is very timid and disingenuous. Montaigne at that time clearly had the

intention of suppressing his friend's important works altogether. After the St. Bartholomew, the Protestants, made quite republican by despair and just indignation, published the Treatise; and it is possible that Montaigne, partly from compunction of conscience towards his friend, partly from horror which he was obliged to dissimulate, communicated a copy for the purpose to some Huguenot acquaintance. I may as well finish the history of the Treatise at once. Ten years later, in 1580, when Montaigne published his Essays, he seems to have felt another twitch of conscience. He begins his Essay on Friendship by a somewhat pompous comparison of his method of writing with that of a painter whom he was employing to decorate his château, and who chose the fine clear space in the middle of the wall to place an elaborate picture, and filled up the borders with scrolls and grotesques. "What are these Essays of mine, indeed," he says, "but grotesque and inform monsters, different members brought together without certain shape, or any order, sequence, or proportion, but from chance? I do not dare to undertake a rich finished picture according to the rules of art: therefore. I have thought of borrowing one from Estienne La Boëtie, which will honour all the rest of my work. It is a discourse to which he gave the name of Voluntary Servitude. This, with some Memoirs on the Edict of January, which may find a place elsewhere, is all I have been able to recover of his remains—I, to whom, with so loving a recommendation, when death was in his throat, he left by will his library

and papers—all except the little volume I have already published."

Here we see that La Boëtie left a copy of this work, which he is said never to have seen since he wrote it, with warm recommendations to Montaigne, who at length determined to publish it, and give it a conspicuous place in his Essays; promising, too, to bring in further on the Memoirs: but his courage again failed him. He thought at first, that by making out the work to be the production of a lad, he might venture:—"Let us listen awhile to this lad of eighteen." Even this immense exaggeration, afterwards increased by two years, did not make him consider himself safe. At the last moment, while the Essays were going through the press, he took out the Treatise, and printed in its stead the twenty-nine sonnets I have already noticed, which a friend of La Boëtie, M. Poyferré, had accidentally found and sent to him. These sonnets were printed in all editions until 1595, then excluded until 1727; since when they have always been reprinted as part of the Essays, except by three editors, one of whom coolly says: "they are not worth reproducing, because they are not worth reading."

Montaigne's excuse for making this substitution is so characteristic, and supports my view so completely, that I shall give it in his own words. The tone of apology, the desire to represent the Treatise as a mere youthful escapade, struggles evidently with the internal reproaches of his conscience; in the same breath he

tells us that La Boetie, in attacking monarchy, did not lie, and was yet a most loyal subject.

"Because I have found that this work has since been published with evil intentions by those who seek to trouble and change the state of our government, without caring whether they will amend it or not, I have refrained from bringing it in here. And in order that the memory of the author may not be misunderstood by those who had not the opportunity of closely looking at his opinions and actions, I tell them that this subject was treated by him in his infancy, by way of exercitation only, as a common subject discussed in a thousand books. I doubt not that he believed what he wrote, for he was sufficiently conscientious not to lie, even in sport; and I know, moreover, that if he had had his choice he would have rather have been born at Venice than at Sarlat: and in this he was right. But he had another maxim deeply imprinted in his mind—that it was proper to obey and submit very religiously to the laws under which he was born. There never was a better citizen, nor one more fond of the repose of his country, nor more inimical to the novelties and movements of his time. He would rather have employed his power in extinguishing them than in furnishing them with new fuel. His mind was moulded on the pattern of other ages than these."

But this, as I have said, was in 1580. Ten years before, Montaigne's friendship, which increased, as many friendships and affections do, by being kept

like wine in a cellar, out of sight, was not so lively and conscientious. He deliberately announced his intention of suppressing the Treatise. If he afterwards gave a copy for the collection of memoirs or pamphlets on the time of Charles the Ninth, published by the Protestants at Middlebourg, it was done with the most profound secrecy. This terrible work ran through three editions from 1576 to 1578, but it does not appear to have been reprinted separately. It disappeared from circulation so much, that when Cardinal Richelieu, seeing allusions to it in the edition of Montaigne dedicated to him by Mademoiselle de Gournay, wished to read it, he sent in vain to all the booksellers of the Rue St. Jacques. At last one Blaise pretended that he knew an amateur who possessed a copy, but would not part with it under five pistoles. The Cardinal agreed to give so much, and the bookseller cut the Treatise out of a copy of the Memoirs he possessed, bound it up, and received his price. At length, in the eighteenth century, the Treatise was reprinted with the Essays, from which it has since rarely been separated. In 1789 a modernized version was given, and another in 1791. The Treatise had at length found its proper atmosphere. In 1802, under the Consulate, a separate edition of the original work appeared. In 1835 M. de Lamennais published two editions; and still later, M. Charles Teste, brother of the minister of that name under Louis Philippe, prepared a modernised edition, printed at Brussels but never circulated, making very direct

applications to contemporary personages. The Treatise has been translated into Italian and English; into the latter admirably in 1735, into the former by Cæsar Parabelli, who published at Naples in the seventh year of the Republic.

But to return from this digression. In August 1570, Montaigne, no longer conseiller, even in name, was at Paris writing the advertisement to his edition of the minor works of La Boëtie, and beginning to overlook the printers. He had been extremely dissatisfied the year before with the numerous errors left in his translation of Sebonde, brought out under the sole superintendence of the printer and publisher, Gabriel Buon. This may account for his employing this time a new printer, Federic Morel, as well as for his determination to be at Paris whilst the work was going through the press. The printing was concluded on the 24th November, but the volume was not published until the following year. It contained the translations from Xenophon and Plutarch, with the Latin verses, several dedications, and the letter of Montaigne to his father on La Boëtie's death. In 1572, some sheets containing the French poems were added to the same volume. After Montaigne's death, the manuscript translation of Aristotle's Economics was found and printed in 1600.

The pages contributed by Montaigne to the edition of 1571 are interesting, as throwing a light on the state of his mind at this period, on his position at court, and on his relations with persons of distinction.

The advertisement begins as follows :—" Reader ! thou owest to me all that thou enjoyest of the late Estienne de la Boëtie ; for let me tell thee, that he had no intention of communicating to thee anything of what I now produce—not esteeming it worthy. But I am not so disdainful, and having found nothing else in his library, which he left me by his will, am not willing to let this perish." Montaigne then enters into details on biographical facts, which I have already given. In another part of the volume, prefixed to the Menagerie of Xenophon, we find a letter to M. de Lansac, Chevalier of the King's Order, Privy Councillor, Superintendent of the Finances, and Captain of the hundred Gentlemen of his house—a singular pluralist —from which we learn that that nobleman had known La Boëtie in his public capacity, and admired him. "But you were very far from knowing him entirely," says Montaigne, preluding already to the Essay on Friendship. " He did me the honour whilst he lived, which I regard as the greatest piece of good fortune that ever befel me, to form with me a friendship so closely knit, that there was not a tendency or movement of his mind which I was unable to consider and judge—except in so far as I may have been short-sighted. Now, without any lie, if we take him for all in all, he was so nearly a miracle that, for fear of being disbelieved, I am obliged to lower my tone in speaking of him. I beg you to believe, however, that our Guienne has not seen the like of him among men of his robe." Then, after some circumlocution, Mon-

taigne admits that he himself had been thinking of writing something. He says, "Save that my insufficiency expressly forbids me, I would present you with something of my own, in acknowledgment of the obligations I owe to you, and the ancient favour and friendship you have shown to those of our house."

The Chancelier L'Hospital, after having tried in vain to struggle against the fanaticism, real or assumed, of power, had now retired to his country-house at Vignay, where he occupied himself in writing Latin poetry. This celebrated man had all the stuff of a reformer, except the vital energy. His preambles and his speeches, it has been remarked, contain a sort of foretaste of 1789. In 1560, when the Protestant nobility and the Liberal middle classes endeavoured by a wonderful effort to deliver the young king Francis from his Italian mother and the Guises, L'Hospital not only approved of the attempt, but actually joined in the conspiracy. About the time of the publication of La Boëtie's works, indeed, the good man ran extreme danger on this account. Agrippa d'Aubigné, talking carelessly to the father of his mistress, had mentioned that he possessed the signature of L'Hospital for the enterprise of Amboise, and was recommended to use it as a means of extorting ten thousand écus. He indignantly rejected the proposition and burned the documents, upon which his adviser affected to be so pleased that he promised him his daughter in marriage,—a promise which he afterwards retracted on pretence of differences in religion. Montaigne de-

dicated the Latin poems to the retired chancellor, whom he considered to be a man of no common virtue, and whom, he says, La Boëtie wished much to know. In doing so he talks politically, enlarges on the necessity of putting the right man in the right place, and says that the interests of France greatly suffered by the non-promotion of La Boëtie to high office. "It was true, that at the age of thirty-two he occupied the highest position as conseiller; but this was not enough. We should not leave in the ranks a man capable of being a captain. But, in truth, his strength was ill managed, and too much husbanded. He had great parts, that remained idle and useless. Therefore, as he was so careless of his reputation during lifetime, I greatly desire that his memory should be properly treated by persons of honour and virtue." Here follows, as it were, another preparation for the Essay on Friendship: "Quite against the custom of the architect, who turns the handsomest part of his building towards the street, and of the chapman, who puts in show the richest specimen of his merchandise, what was most recommendable in him, the true juice and marrow of his worth, went with him: nothing remains to us but the bark and the leaves. He who should set forth the regulated movements of his soul, his piety, his virtue, his justice, the vivacity of his mind, the weight and health of his judgment, the loftiness of his conceptions, so far raised above the vulgar, his knowledge, the graces that accompanied all his actions, the tender love he bore his wretched country, his capital and

sworn hatred against all vice, but chiefly against that ugly traffic which hides itself under the name of justice, would certainly beget in all worthy people a singular affection for him, mingled with a marvellous regret for his loss." I have already hinted, that some of Montaigne's expressions in the Essays are so hyperbolical and exaggerated as to seem cold, and suggest, erroneously, the idea of insincerity. In this letter, written about seven years after La Boëtie's death, when his feelings had had time to disengage themselves from the weight of daily cares, but not to acquire a marked development, his friendship seems to me more justly and pathetically expressed. Already, however, he was secretly comparing himself and La Boëtie to ancient examples of affection: "nothing has been said in the schools of the philosophers on the rights and duties of sacred friendship that this personage and I did not practise together."

Another dedication in the same volume is to M. de Foix, "Privy Councillor and Ambassador of His Majesty to the Signoria of Venice," one of the most remarkable men of his time, of whom De Thou says that he never left his society without feeling himself improved, and better disposed to virtue. Montaigne tells us that he belonged to the first house of Guienne by inheritance, and had acquired the first rank by capacity. He had previously been ambassador in England, and was shortly afterwards sent again to Italy, on a complimentary journey to the Pope and other princes. Learning and ability had early dis-

tinguished him. His house was always full of learned men, as Jacques Carpentier, the adversary of Ramus, Augustin Nypho, and others, with whom he loved to discourse on his favourite philosopher, Aristotle. A young reader whom he employed, constantly read out to him—indeed he scarcely ever used his own eyes for purposes of study. When he wished to become acquainted with the doctrines of Plato on his way to Italy—a journey he performed on horseback—he made Armand d'Ossat ride by his side, and explain them to him, whilst all the rest of his suite, among whom was the young De Thou, kept at a distance. It was to this amiable and learned man that Montaigne dedicated the French poems of La Boëtie. His tone, as usual, is panegyrical. "To me alone," says he, "did he communicate himself entire. I only can describe the million graces, perfections, and virtues which idly decayed in his mind. . . . The truth is, having been surprised by his destiny in the flower of his age, in the midst of a very vigorous and happy health, he had thought of nothing less than publishing works to testify to posterity what he was; and probably he was sufficiently proud, even if he had thought of it, not to care much about it . . . However," continues Montaigne, "I have thought it well to collect what I could find entire among his rough drafts and papers, scattered here and there, the sport of the wind and his studies, and to separate the whole into as many parts as I could, in order to recommend his memory to as many people, choosing the

most apparent and worthy personages of my acquaintance; as, for example, you, sir, who may have known him a little during his life, but not sufficiently to estimate his worth. Posterity may believe me if it please, but I swear to it upon my conscience that I knew him, and saw him in such wise that, all things considered, scarcely by imagination can I rise higher, far from being able to give him many companions." He then says that north of the Loire, that is in the real French provinces, these poems of La Boëtie had not been thought sufficiently polished, for which reason he had delayed their publication. However, other literary judges having given a more favourable opinion, Montaigne, whose partiality wonderfully exaggerated the merit of these pieces, determined to present them to the public.

But among all these dedications, which are already almost Essays, the most interesting is, perhaps, that of the Rules of Marriage of Plutarch to M. de Mesmes, Seigneur de Roissy et de Malassize, and Privy Councillor. M. de Mesmes was of the same age as Montaigne, and has left valuable memoirs of his life. He had just negociated a peace between the Catholics and Protestants, which had restored sudden but uncertain tranquillity to the country, and was rising every day in popularity. He was once actually and literally kicked out of court by Henry the Third. The scandalous anecdotes of the time accuse him of peculation, but this is less certain than that he was a protector of poets and the learned. It is curious that the manu-

script of the Voluntary Servitude, recently discovered by Dr. Payen, belonged to him, and contains many marginal notes for an elaborate refutation of the republican and socialist doctrines of the young Sarladais. It probably came direct from Montaigne himself.

"La Boëtie," now says Montaigne roundly, "was, in my opinion, the greatest man of our age; and I should be ill doing my duty if I did not endeavour to resuscitate and keep alive his reputation. I think he must in some sort feel and be touched, and rejoiced, by my care; and, in truth, he is here within me so entire, and so living, that I cannot believe him to be so heavily buried, nor so completely distanced from communion with us."

But what makes this little production remarkable is the blame incidentally inflicted on the sceptical habit. "It is one of the most notable follies that men commit, to employ the force of their understanding in ruining and shocking the common and received opinions which produce in us satisfaction and content. Whilst all other things under the sun apply the means and instruments which nature has given them for the utility and commodity of their being, such men, in order to seem of a more sprightly and lively wit, unwilling to receive anything which has not been a thousand times touched and balanced by the most subtle reason, go on disturbing their minds from its peaceable repose, and succeed, after long search, in filling it with doubt, disquietude, and fever. It is not without reason that childhood and simplicity have

been so much recommended by Truth itself. For my part, I would rather be more at my ease and less clever, more content and less knowing."

In this last touch Montaigne gives the whole spirit of his Essays by anticipation. But we need not suppose that his respectful allusion to Christianity, and his horror of doubt, were at all hypocritical. At that time Montaigne, like most of the other active men of his age, was probably a staunch believer from habit. He had not had leisure to disturb his own belief, or "employ the force of his understanding in ruining and shocking the common, received opinions" of others; but his character was formed, and he was already yearning after that famous ataraxia, the mirage of philosophers. He at first sought it in faith, where he might have found it: afterwards he sought it in doubt, by means of which he tried to persuade himself, and has succeeded in persuading many of his admirers, that he came back to faith.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### MONTAIGNE IN LITERARY SOCIETY.

THE long residence of Montaigne at Paris, necessitated by the task of overlooking the printers, and prolonged on account of the unusual tranquillity of the country, no doubt brought him much in contact with the literary men of the day. Buon and Morel, who published Sebonde and La Boëtie, seem to have been the two fashionable publishers, and produced the works of Ronsard and the other great poets of the period. Montaigne, at Meudon and the Louvre with La Boëtie, formerly knew and admired the shining lights of the Pleiad; but he had no reason then to claim their intimacy. Now, his position entitled him to do so, and there can be no doubt that he profited by the opportunity. It is not good in biography to supply too often the want of facts by conjectures and speculations, but sometimes they are allowable, nay, necessary. A conjecture, naturally suggested, that takes its place among ascertained facts, harmonises with them, completes them, and illustrates them, is almost a new fact.

The relations of Montaigne with the Pleiad are no way stated, but will scarcely be denied by any one who reads his works. The splendid position of Ronsard at the period of which we now speak is known. He was the literary king of his time; and, as has been well remarked, no man save Voltaire ever exercised so much influence in France on the taste of his contemporaries. The favour of Charles the Ninth—the sickly, insane, yet poetic young Nimrod, who hunted beasts whilst waiting to hunt men — had replaced the favour of Henry the Second. Abbeys, benefices, pensions, gifts of all kinds, were heaped upon him. A vast multitude of young poets, whom failure could not discourage nor disdain drive to despair, were exercising their talents in flattering him. The air was as full of his praises as with the murmur of grasshoppers on a summer day.

Montaigne could not fail to be attracted towards such a reputation during his literary residence in Paris. About that time was formed a centre where genius and learning could meet and communicate, and interchange criticism and flattery. Antoine de Baïf, overwhelmed with royal munificence, had established a kind of Academy, the nucleus of which was collected, according to Pasquier, under Henry the Second. He lived in the Faubourg St. Marceau, in a house on the site of which was afterwards built the convent of English nuns, now celebrated as the place of education of Madame Sand. In order that nobody might fail to know that a man of erudition lived there, he caused inscriptions to be written in large letters under every

window:—extracts from Anacreon, Pindar, and Homer, which agreeably regaled the eyes of learned passers-by. In this house, which has sometimes been spoken of as a *petite maison*, Baïf lived a life of learned ease, kept an excellent table, and invited literary men and musicians to share his good fortune. By degrees, the idea occurred to him of establishing an Academy of poets, and *beaux esprits*, and musicians, with a view at first chiefly of measuring the elementary sounds of the language. It was in 1570, whilst Montaigne was printing his La Boëtie at Paris, that Charles the Ninth granted to this Academy letters patent, in which he declared, that "in order that it may be honoured by the greatest, he accepted the title of protector and first auditor." The verification of these letters was violently opposed by the Parliament, instigated by the University and the Bishop of Paris; but this opposition was overruled. Charles the Ninth used often to be present at the meetings of the Academy, and it is especially recorded that the members were allowed to sit in his presence. The unhappy young king had already, in a poem, laid his crown at the feet of Ronsard. At the death of Charles the Ninth, Henry the Third took the Academy under his protection. He wrote out new letters-patent on vellum with his own hands, signed them, and made his mother Catherine, the Duke of Joyeuse, the Duke of Retz, and most of the lords and ladies of his court, sign also, and promise to pay an annual subscription. Occasionally he came gravely to listen to philosophical discourses by Amadis Jasmyn.

But instead of going always to the house of Baïf, the king made the Academy meet twice a-week in his own cabinet, where many learned men and even ladies disputed on set questions of criticism and philosophy—a model of our debating societies. He who most distinguished himself at one meeting, chose the subject for the next. Music played a great part in this Academy, and a kind of opera was once performed in the house of Baïf. But the Academy only lasted until the death of its founder, when it dispersed, and was forgotten amidst the stern business the country had to settle: all its archives were actually sold to a pastry-cook. The letters-patent were long afterwards accidentally found by a son of Baïf. Among the members of the Academy were Pierre Ronsard, Amadis Jasmyn, Guy du Faur de Pibrac, Philippe des Portes, Jacques Davy du Perron, and afterwards Agrippa d'Aubigné, with others; and we can scarcely doubt that Montaigne was present, introduced by his friend Pibrac at some of the sittings.

It would appear even that Ronsard used to read his poems to him; for to whom but to Ronsard can the following passage allude?—"Somebody once tried to persuade me that a man, *whom all true Frenchmen know*, had imposed upon me by reciting verses he had written. His pronunciation gave price to his works. If I had read them myself, I should have thought otherwise."

Among the striking events that occurred during the residence of Montaigne at Paris, in the winter

of 1570–71, was the arrival of the Cardinal d'Este, having in his suite Tasso, who, although only twenty-six years of age, had acquired a brilliant reputation, and was sent as likely to please the literary young king. The poet, by the recommendation of the Princess Leonora, had obtained the honour of dining, not in the pantry, but at the Cardinal's ordinary table, and thus was not confounded with that crowd of eight hundred servitors who followed the splendid churchman. It is necessary occasionally to remind the reader of these irruptions of Italian splendour into the semi-barbarous society of France at that period. The Italian cardinals of the sixteenth century much resembled, in their ways of going on, Oriental kings. One day the Cardinal d'Este, as a caprice, sent to the king forty war-horses, with saddles and trappings embroidered with gold, and led by forty grooms dressed in silk. Tasso, accustomed to the accomplished luxury of his country, was astonished by the rude state of France. He complained that, instead of marble palaces, he found in Paris houses generally of wood, with no spacious staircases, but winding steps leading to low, dark rooms, heaped together irregularly, so that no two were ever on the same level. Above these frail structures rose huge, solid cathedrals, of an architecture that appeared to him barbarous, decorated with sculptures and paintings of primitive simplicity; but lighted through broad painted windows of unequalled beauty, that tinted with fantastic hues the crowds of kneeling

worshippers, whose assiduity and earnestness surprised him. When Montaigne afterwards went to Milan he compared it to Paris; Tasso compared Paris to Milan. But he disliked the changeableness of the climate, and accounted by it for the fickleness of the inhabitants, who ever kept in motion, lest, like the wheels of a clock that have run down, they should grow rusty.

Tasso became acquainted with Ronsard, who was preparing the edition of his works in six volumes, published in 1572. The two poets read their verses to each other, and interchanged admiration. Tasso translated Ronsard's hymn on Henry the Second. He became very popular at first in France; and as Montaigne afterwards went to see him when he was shut up in a madhouse in Ferrara, they probably met and knew each other in the early part of 1571. It is a curious circumstance, illustrative of the condition of literature in those days, that although Tasso's expenses were paid during this journey, he was left so poor that he was obliged occasionally to borrow a few francs of his French friends, and went back to Italy, after a year's residence, with the same coat in which he came.

I cannot refrain here from giving a specimen of contemporary French criticism. M. St. Marc Girardin, mentioning the visit of Tasso, exclaims: "Observe the caprices of posterity! When he came to see Ronsard and to ask his advice, he was only called Messer Torquato Tasso; and since then France has called

him *Le Tasse!*" Observe the caprices of posterity! Rome knew a Titus Livius, whom France has since called *Tite Live!*

Montaigne seems always to have remained a favourite of Catherine de Medicis, as he had been a favourite of her husband. She introduced and recommended him to the three kings, her sons. This is the most obscure passage in the life of Montaigne. We almost shrink from examining it too closely, for fear of coming upon facts too disagreeable. The statement that Montaigne once acted as the queen's secretary is now refuted, after having formed part of his biography for more than a century; but that he was on good terms with the queen and her court is proved by many circumstances.

Montaigne probably came in contact with Charles the Ninth, both at the Louvre and at the Academy of Baïf; and had opportunities of appreciating his private character, and observing the good qualities that have been concealed from the eyes of posterity by the bloody vapour which he afterwards cast about himself. It is necessary to insist on these suppositions, because the reputation of Montaigne is directly interested. He never mentions the Saint Bartholomew, which his master Muretus and his friend De Pibrac approved of; and it is certain that some powerful motive must have existed to make him keep silence on such a subject. No mere inadvertence can account for the omission. The true reason seems to me that, during a great part of the reign of Charles the Ninth,

Montaigne was closely connected with the Court, and attached by ties of friendship and gratitude both to the queen-mother and the king. He was also publicly a member of the Catholic party; an intimate friend of the old Maréchal Montluc, who had, just before the peace of 1570, received at the taking of the Protestant town of Rabestens the wound that disabled him from further service, and had revenged himself by ordering the massacre of all within the place, men, women, and children; a friend of the young Count de Brissac, the pupil of Buchanan, who was killed by a Huguenot shot at the siege of Muçidan; —and, indeed, was everyway compromised to approve of the policy which he had no influence to alter, and which led to the famous day of massacre. The overt manner in which he identifies himself with this policy in the Essays is remarkable. He talks, for example, of the thousand little pamphlets which "those of the religion so-called Reformed circulated for the defence of their cause, written sometimes by able hands which he regretted not to see employed on a better subject;" and says deprecatingly, that in one a comparison was made between the government of "the late poor king, Charles the Ninth," and that of Nero. This tone, it is true, may be reconciled to the supposition, so firmly supported by our knowledge of Montaigne's moderate opinions, that he condemned the Saint Bartholomew as cruel and unwise; because it implies that he agreed with those who considered Charles the Ninth to have been mad. The praises given to Cathe-

rine for her natural liberality and magnificence, and her love of building, are more offensive, but may be explained by the desire of the prudent philosopher to keep well with the Court, and maintain himself in a favour which he often wanted—once, especially, to rescue himself from the Bastille.

But most inexcusable is the adulatory manner, though qualified by certain restrictions, in which Montaigne exalts the memory of the Cardinal de Lorraine, who was employed at Rome to carry the glad tidings of the massacre to the Pope; whose whole career, however splendid, was one of perfidy and cruelty; and who haunted his accomplice and probable murderess Catherine, like Banquo, amidst her women, who saw nothing whilst she trembled with terror. A bigoted Catholic soldier or churchman we might expect to hear talk of that corrupt man's "wit, eloquence, zeal towards religion, and the service of his king," and so forth; but no one can believe that Montaigne could have been sufficiently blinded. He was evidently inclined to be a flatterer of the powers that be. The Guises were high in favour when he wrote. We should very much misunderstand his character indeed, and confound him with those complete men who, in classical times, from philosophic or patriotic enthusiasm, in modern times from Christian faith or republican convictions, have been ready to sacrifice their lives for the truth, if we did not recognise in him occasionally the time-server and the egotist. These sceptics have always been remarkable

for the zeal with which they have taken care of their persons. Montaigne suggests an unfortunate comparison of himself with the cowardly Panurge, who was always ready to maintain his opinions, *jusqu'au feu exclusivement*. There was, it must be admitted, something of the Panurge in him; but accompanied after all with so many fine qualities, that we easily forgive him. Indeed those whom we love most are not necessarily possessed of the greatest courage.

Among the proofs of Montaigne's favour at court about this period, we must count his admission into the Order of St. Michel. He tells us, that when young he had desired above all things to receive this Order, because it was then the extremest mark of honour of the French nobility, and very rare; but that he did not receive it until it had utterly fallen off in public estimation, in consequence of the immense number of unworthy appointments made. It had come to be called "the collar of all beasts." Of course, however, the appointment was intended as a compliment. Montaigne was probably not among the importunate gentlemen mentioned by Pasquier, who clamoured for reward for their services; and who, there being no money to give, were recompensed with appointments to the Privy Council and the Order of St. Michel. Brantome pretends that the whole affair was a sort of practical joke of Gaston de Foix, Marquis de Trans, a neighbour and friend of Montaigne, and who also attained a similar honour for his butler; but the Sieur de Bourdeilles was a pedantic courtier, who was

offended by seeing honours granted to a conseiller who had quitted his robes and his square hat and girded on the sword, as Montaigne had done. The truth seems to be, that when Montaigne retired from court and public affairs, his friends reminded the king that he had not received any reward: in consequence of which, about eight months after he had taken up his residence at Montaigne, he received the following letter:—

"Monsieur de Montaigne,—For your virtues and merits I have chosen and elected you among the number of the Chevaliers of my Order, to be associated with them; and that your said election may be notified to you, and that you may receive the collar of the said Order, I have written to my cousin the Marquis de Trans, to whose presence you will repair for the purpose. This is to augment more and more the affection and good will I bear you, and to give you occasion to persevere in your devotion for my service. Praying God, &c.

"Written at Blois, the eighteenth of October, 1571.

(Signed) "CHARLES."

The most careful researches do not seem to have established the exact date of an appointment which Montaigne received between the years 1569 and 1580, that of Gentleman in Ordinary of the King's Bed-chamber, an office to which many privileges and some

emoluments were attached. He rarely fulfilled his duties, but the appointment was useful to him when he came to court, as it gave him free access to the king, and enabled him to take up a position that was no doubt satisfactory to his vanity.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MONTAIGNE RETIRES TO HIS CHATEAU.

THERE still exists in the Château of Montaigne the following inscription:—

"In the year of our Lord 1571, aged thirty-eight, on the eve of the Kalends of March, (the last day of February), the anniversary day of his birth, Michel de Montaigne, having long been weary of the slavery of courts and public employments, takes refuge in the bosom of the learned Virgins. He designs, in quiet and indifference to all things, to conclude there the remainder of his life, already more than half past, and he has dedicated to repose and liberty this agreeable and peaceful abode, which he has inherited from his ancestors."

Some persons seem to have taken this inscription as a proof that, from its date forward, Montaigne generally lived the life of a hermit, and kept almost utterly apart from the world. This is an exaggeration. But, despite the attempts made recently to convert him into a public man, it is quite evident that, whether at home

or abroad, in his château or in the Louvre, Montaigne from this time forward lived the life of a literary man; and looked upon the world and upon himself almost exclusively as materials for Essay-writing. Previously he had had literary tastes, and had studied a good deal; but his existence had been noisy and public. It is difficult, therefore, to say what was the amount of his knowledge when he turned his back on the Court and the house of law and took up his pen. We know, however, that even then he could write well; and no one writes well by instinct, nor without long and painful experience. We can pretty well appreciate, also, Montaigne's character, and find in his experience the type of his impressions. But they who would take to pieces such a man as they take to pieces a machine, and discover the reason of all his movements,—who would account by inferences from accumulated facts for the growth of his genius,—who would discover the precise point at which he was converted from a mere ordinary courtier or lawyer into one of the teachers of our race, may be utterly disappointed, and driven to the conclusion that they are dealing with an absolute power, sent into the world to do such and such things; no more, no less—but that, and that only;—Homer, Dante, and Shakspeare, predestined to Epic or Drama. This easy explanation cannot satisfy the eager student. But, unfortunately, what he most desires to know is the most difficult to know. We open biographies of great writers, great poets, great thinkers, and seek in vain to find how and when they became as it were trans-

figured. We are led on by the promise of revelations. It is just as if we should chase the morning light on Eastern hills. The time arrives, unperceived, when we look back and find the rays shining another way.

I have endeavoured to trace Montaigne through his early experiences in the Louvre, the camp, the law courts, the college, the boudoir, the arms of friendship and of love, because everywhere he must have been subject to influences that reappear in his speculations in after life. It is not necessary to describe the intellectual chemistry to which his experiences were subjected in order to produce the result we see. We all feel how such influences work, and can watch, if we please, the transformation of fact into sentiment and thought. There was nothing very wonderful in the adventures of Montaigne's youth. As we have seen, his life was that of a tolerably commonplace gentleman, born to move in good society, with a little more knowledge than gentlemen thought necessary at that time. The only very remarkable incident is his friendship for La Boëtie. There are but five or six such recorded instances since the beginning of the world, and unrecorded instances cannot be taken into account; for in the friendships of celebrated men who have influenced the world, the world herself is interested. Influence comes to us from that friendship. In a brief life of Montaigne up to this period it would be necessary only to say: He lived as other men of his rank lived in those times, and he was the friend of Estienne de la Boëtie. For my part, I find

two men in Montaigne, such as he appears to me at the prime of life—the man of wide capacity of mind, of vivid imagination, humorous, but solid character, nimble judgment, and natural faculty of expression, who would have made himself remarkable in any age or country, and who supplies that part of his Essays which makes him kin to the whole world—but also the man of his age and country; the somewhat ungrateful heir of Rabelais, the forerunner of Bayle and Voltaire; the experienced courtier, who despised kings because he knew their manners, but had no enthusiasm to object to the institution of monarchy; the lawyer, who cared too little for law to espouse its prejudices, and sat half apart, like a quiet man in society, observing absurdities which others hotly and unconsciously acted; the half-convinced Catholic, who looked upon reform as a disturbance, but who, when like an honest man he turned round to examine his own convictions, saw them vanishing in the distance; the stern thinker in morals; the cheerful and somewhat lax actor; the incomplete savant, who despised pedantry; the eloquent writer, who felt that his idiom was not formed, and disdained to form it; idle and industrious by turns; of prodigious memory, yet fond of accusing himself of want of memory when he forgot anything; the easy-going Gascon gentleman, who from fear of shipwreck in the storm he saw gathering—for the Saint Bartholomew was then darkening the air as it approached—retired to his comfortable home in an out-of-the-way district, and, partly as an excuse for

his timidity, set to work philosophising, under the protection of powerful friends and a long-established reputation for probity.

In speaking of La Boëtie, I have been incidentally led to allude to the state of literature in France, when Montaigne was likely to receive his most vivid and lasting impressions of that kind. He was, as it were, present at the submerging of the few gentle and native reputations—that flourished, like little oases, amidst the desert of ignorance and barbarism,—by a sudden flood of learning disguised as genius, or genius disguised as learning, that burst from the monastery of Coqueret. During the whole time of his residence at court this deluge covered the earth. There was no sign whatever of the subsiding of the waters. He felt, it would seem, a feeling of despondency and discouragement. It was impossible for him, he thought, to know so much, or to express himself so well. Never till the latest hour of his life did he cease to look with awe upon the genius of the men who at that time won his admiration. It would, indeed, have been a sort of insult to La Boëtie to have done so. He always spoke of Ronsard and Du Bellay with profound respect, and never ceased to admire "the rich descriptions of the one, or the delicate inventions of the other." According to him, these two men "were little removed from the perfection of the ancient poets"—the highest praise that could be given at that time—and in so saying he ratifies the prediction of his friend.

That was the golden age of learned men in France. They acquired reputations in the strangest manner, and for the strangest reasons. The country had so recently been barbarous from excess of ignorance, that extravagant respect was paid to knowledge of every kind, but especially to knowledge of antiquity. Even the greatest poets stood little chance by the side of "the Great Turnebus;" and the merest collector of quotations from ancient authors was placed on a level with the most eminent writer. Feron, a lawyer, published "The Armories of Universal History," and began with the escutcheon of Adam, bearing a device from Ovid; and, no doubt, would have been offended at not being considered a more important man than the ignorant Marot. The epithet, "bold ignoramus," was applied by Scaliger to Montaigne himself. It was, certainly, more on account of their immense display of learning than their genius that the new school of poets achieved their success.

We must remember that literature was not in those days, properly speaking, constituted. Scarcely any one wrote as a profession; but every one who felt the influence of the culture that was spreading, wrote more or less. Almost all royal personages of the sixteenth century had pretensions to poetry. We have verses of all the kings, from Francis the First to Henry the Fourth. Marguerite of Navarre, and Marguerite of Valois, have left most interesting works, — the "Heptameron" and the "Memoirs." Mary Stuart was a poet. René de France wrote poetry, and

encouraged the learned. Nearly all the celebrated courtiers, diplomatists, lawyers of the age, wrote. Few celebrated books had for authors men who in their time were not far more celebrated for something else than writing.

At the courts of the kings and queens of France, and in the houses of princes and noblemen, there were always, it is true, certain pages or parasites, whose principal claim to notice was their skill in inditing amorous and other poetry, and who were helping to found the modern literary class, which lived so long on patronage. Jean Marot had been private secretary and poet of Louis the Twelfth. Clement Marot, Victor Brodeaux, and Jean Chapuis, were valets-de-chambre of Francis the First. Saint-Gelais, and a few other elegant writers of that stamp, were, it is true, courtiers. But nearly all who studied form, merely for form, were at that time in a humble or menial position. Ronsard was a page and a retired soldier. The learned were mostly professors, and laboured under the accusation of pedantry. Amyot was a servant at college, and studied, like Ramus, by the light of burning charcoal from want of candles; but his translations earned him a mitre as well as renown. Duchatel rose from being reader in a printing-office to be grand almoner of France; and was paid by the king to talk to him during his meals. Other learned men were only too happy to accept printers for patrons, and have recorded with gratitude their dinners with the Plantins, whose proofs they corrected. It is easy to understand that

at such a time Montaigne determined to devote himself to letters; and not yet having his philosophical object clearly in view, was at first puzzled what form to adopt. Once he thought of writing the history of his times; but he was not industrious enough to collect the facts, and indisposed by nature to lay out a vast framework. He talked to a friend, probably Pasquier, on the best shape in which to put his desultory thoughts, and was advised to write letters. He would have done so, he says, if he had known to whom to have addressed them. How he came to adopt the form of Essays we shall see in due time.

# CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE CHATEAU DE MONTAIGNE.

MONTAIGNE, as we have seen, was thirty-eight years of age when, professing to be weary of the slavery of courts and public employments, he retired to dwell in the mansion of his forefathers, and devote himself to study and meditation. We shall presently note that his retirement was neither so absolute nor so prolonged as he expected. He knew the world by experience, and found it to be full of annoyances; but he did not yet know solitude and the painful yearning for variety which visits the soul when too long becalmed in the domestic haven.

I have reserved for this place a description of the castle of Montaigne, with which the philosopher has, to a certain extent, identified himself and his works. It was the place of his meditations, as the court and the world formed the place of his experiences. Curiosity and veneration have made it the goal of pilgrimage. Visitors, few and choice it is true, every year demand admission at its gates, or linger modestly on neigh-

bouring heights. They are not led thither by that passionate fondness, that mysterious and almost sinful affection, which converts into valuable property every place where Rousseau suffered or was eloquent; but by a calm sympathy, an honest admiration of worth, circumscribed in its manifestation by cheerful egotism, which is one of the characteristics that finds the sympathy of the steady readers for whom these pages are chiefly written. You will generally observe that the admirers of Montaigne have a great many books of their own, not modern cheap editions, but solid calf-bound volumes, bought at second-hand much cheaper; that they are, if not exactly eccentric people, people of marked features of character; that they have often a good sober-looking volume in their pockets, and form, in fact, a coterie of observers and thinkers, who run together like quicksilver when they meet, and are rather formed to instruct youth and suggest wisdom to the idle or impetuous, than themselves to take any very active part in this world's affairs.

I approached the limits of Perigord from Libourne, —a name which will recur in this biography—along the valley of the Dordogne. This valley, though without any very marked features, is by no means unpleasant to behold. Tints of yellow were mingling with the green when I passed. The reaches of the river were lighted by a sky of great depth, that warmed with bright colours morning and evening. The villages are towards the tops of the uniform hills, or crowd amidst trees at the narrow entrances of valleys. This

arrangement marks a particular degree in the development of civilisation. There was one remnant of a castle on a rock—a sort of stump worn down and jagged like a tooth in an old man's jaw. They told me that the Auvergnats, during the revolution time, had spread their devastations thus far, sacking the lordly castles, which the timid and humble peasants of Perigord neither coveted nor defended. I heard many whining dialogues between natives of the country on the probable failure of the grape harvest for ever. Discouraged by three bad seasons, they predicted that within fifty years wine would be only found in the shops of chemists.

There was little to notice by the wayside that was characteristic. There were huge pumpkins drying on the sloping roofs of the farm-houses; quinces, nearly golden in colour, were hanging from the trees; tomatoes glowed amid pale-green foliage in the fields, the hedge-rows of which were of vines. Sullen-looking oxen, with their heads enveloped in sheepskins and their horns half sawn off, butted slowly and sternly against their yokes; and the huge, ungainly carts, moved on. There was a slowness and solemnity about all habitual operations; but our diligence rolled along smoothly enough, and evidently corresponded to a certain demand for activity felt in some awakened section of the population. A plentiful supply of passengers' parcels and bags of specie were received and registered by the conductor, who talked or swore all the way.

St. Michel de Montaigne, say the biographers, is near Ste. Foi. Properly speaking, it is near to Castillon, through which town I passed, carelessly omitting to mention the object of my visit. Visitors had better make inquiries there. I spoke to the swearing conductor when the place was a league behind, and learned that I must return to Castillon and accept his services as guide and postilion from that place, which I did.

In besieging Castillon our great Talbot fell. It was a fortified place in Montaigne's time, when it stood a long siege. At present it is an open, straggling place, suggestive of dreary agricultural and provincial content. The road, for a short time, is the same as that to Ste. Foi; but soon it turns off, and we see the castle on the shoulder of a hill to the right, overlooking the undulating country. The approach to it is circuitous, for the Didoire is not bridged in many places. It unfortunately rained, and a slaty cloud seemed every now and then threatening to hide the castle. At length, leaving the road to Monpin, we entered at once on the Montaigne estate, and returned towards the château by a bad road and two dangerous bridges over the Didoire and a little confluent. This part was principally wood and meadow, and probably has not much changed in three centuries. We might choose any one of these glades as the background of a portrait of Montaigne. The peasants of his time could scarcely have been more wild-looking, and no doubt resembled those of the present day pretty nearly, except that they always went armed. Perhaps they were worse covered,

for it was the custom in that part of the country in Montaigne's time for the contadins, or peasants, to go with breasts and stomachs naked.

The road ascends diagonally along a steep, wooded slope, that rises to the terrace in front of the château. Now, as in ancient times, it winds round to the rear, and leads to the semi-fortified entrance, guarded by Montaigne's own tower, at one of the angles of the

THE CHATEAU, FROM THE COURT-YARD.

great court-yard. The principal part of the building, an irregular but picturesque pile, though doubtless nearly in the same state, considered as a mass, as in Montaigne's time, suggests no remark, except that the walls are extremely thick, and the apartments very spacious. The imagination, however, is naturally excited by its aspect; and we remember, not without a certain feeling of sadness and awe, that some of the most celebrated men of the sixteenth century came

thither full of life and learning, ambition and business, and are now the objects of elaborate research.

Pierre Eyquem, as his son often tells us, was fond of building, and made many additions to the château. Perhaps it was he built the great tower called the Tour de Montaigne that overlooks the entrance, and the small tower at the other angle called the Trachère, which tradition, for no reason except its own love of completeness, makes the special habitation of Montaigne's wife, and which has recently been partly destroyed for lime-making purposes. Egyptian temples and the abodes of genius are destined to the same fate.

Around the wall encircling the court, and partly concealed by stables and offices, seems formerly to have ran a ledge or walk, near the summit, which served as a footing to the garrison when engaged in repulsing any attack.

The most interesting traces of old times are, however, to be found in the Tour de Montaigne, which is now no longer inhabited, but preserved as a relic of genius. A lady, referring to this care, said: "What has he done, this Montaigne, to be venerated?" I thought at first this was a sign of rustic ignorance of his Essays; but when I found it was not, I was led to reflect:—"After all, what has he done that we should visit his library as a saint's shrine? Have we not substituted the idolatry of genius for the idolatry of virtue? and is this progress?"

There are two stories to the tower, which is round

and massive like a dungeon, and attached to a square tower, smaller, but of about equal height. On the ground-floor, which Montaigne counts as a story, we find the chapel alluded to in the Essays. There we are shown the altar, and an aperture communicating with a recess on the first-floor, where Montaigne, according to local tradition, used sometimes to sit and hear mass; perhaps with a Seneca slily in his hand, or a night-cap on his head. On the summit of the building may still be seen the little chamber where hung a huge bell, which every day, morning and evening, used to ring the Ave Maria with such violence that the tower itself was "astonished;" yet Montaigne by degrees got accustomed to it, and was no more kept awake than by the sermons of his chaplain—if he had one, and did not rather depend upon some neighbour or chance passenger for spiritual food. Perhaps there was no other chapel for his retainers and farmers in the district.

On the first-floor, reached by a winding-staircase, there is a large circular chamber and a small square one, which formed Montaigne's bed-room and dressing-room, when he chose to sleep alone. Above, exactly on the same plan, determined by the shape of the two contiguous towers, are another circular room and another square cabinet. The rafters of this great room, which was Montaigne's library, are quite bare, as they have always been, and covered with inscriptions carefully cut under Montaigne's own direction. Not very long ago a little set of shelves was shown as having

contained the philosopher's books, and a table "on which he wrote his Essays." These have been removed, and need not be regretted; for the shelves, at any rate, were apocryphal. Montaigne's books were ranged on shelves attached to the wall in five rows, all round the room.

On the sides of the little square cabinet, which was capable of a fire in winter, still remain the traces of the fresco paintings, which the philosopher himself mentions. He tells us that he had a painter whose way of working he desired to follow. I observe, he says, that he chooses the clearest and most central part of each wall, in order to place there a completely elaborated picture, whilst the empty spaces around he fills with grotesque or fantastical paintings, whose only grace is variety and strangeness. These elaborated paintings consisted, oddly enough, of a portrait of Eleonore his daughter, and a series of sprightly, or rather erotic scenes; as, for example, Venus surprised by Vulcan with Mars. They have been carefully daubed over by a successor, perhaps by Eleonore's own command, and all we can distinguish is a head here, a leg there, and a few vague flourishes, remnants of the grotesques, the women ending in fish-tails, which Montaigne pretends he succeeded better in imitating in his style than the finished works.

From the three windows, looking out of deep embrasures, in the great circular room, a very extensive view can be obtained over the estate and the distant hills of Perigord. Now, too, as in Montaigne's time,

you can see the garden, the farm-yard, the court, and obtain a glimpse into most of the rooms of the house. A fine position for a master! It was in two sides of the square room that Montaigne thought of opening doors to communicate with two terraces, or "proumenoirs," each a hundred feet long and twelve feet wide, which he wished to establish. The walls were already finished, being the great outer wall, and an inner one built for some purpose not known to him; and there was nothing to do but to lay down the flooring. He shrank, however, from the trouble and expense, although often sadly at a loss—in spite of his great room, sixteen paces in diameter—for a place to stretch his legs, and thus relieve his ideas. His thoughts slept if he sat down. All who study without books, he says, are in this predicament. Without books! This is a bold expression for a man to set down in the midst of a well-furnished library. We shall examine presently what he means by it.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### EXPERIENCES OF COUNTRY LIFE AND MANNERS.

EVEN in the present day Montaigne is quite an out-of-the-way place. There is no town in sight, even on the extreme horizon; which everywhere is high, undulating, forested. The remains of the château de Gurson—situated on a hill, which Montaigne often uses as a term of comparison in his Travels—indent the sky towards the north. In his time it was inhabited by a family with which he was on constant terms of intercourse—the family of the Gaston de Foix, Marquis de Trans, whom I have already mentioned. Around, as now, amidst the meadows and fields, were a few villages or hamlets, the residence of the peasantry. Society was rare; merely depending on chance. Montaigne, who owes so much to reading, pretends that when he wished to write he kept as far as possible from the company and memory of books, "lest they should interfere with his *form*;" and even ventures to say, that it was in search of this kind of originality, so narrow and valueless, that he chose to write at home,

in a savage country, where there was no one to help or correct him; where, as a rule, he frequented no one who understood the Latin of his Pater Noster; where French was even less known than Latin. As we shall see, however, Montaigne greatly exaggerates his isolation. We know his library; and know, too, that learned strangers were constantly winding up towards the château in quest of hospitality. And we know that Montaigne, despite the society that came to him, sallied forth from time to time to see how the world went, and returned with new stores of experience.

Still, the Essays bear many marks of having been written by a country gentleman. The murmur from the farm-yard sometimes resounds through Montaigne's sentences; and breezes from orchard, and hill, and valley, fan our cheeks as we flutter his leaves. He is no minute describer: he does not paint the roughnesses of tree bark or count the veins of a leaf; but the masses around cast impressions into his mind which he reproduces. "When I dance, I dance," says he; explaining how each pursuit absorbed him in its turn. "When I slumber, I slumber; and when I stroll alone beneath the branches of a fair orchard, if I allow my thoughts to commune awhile with things remote and foreign, some other while I recall them to my stroll, to the orchard, to the sweetness of the solitude, and to myself." This fair orchard belonged to him and still exists behind the château, gently spread on the eastern slope of the hill. All his illustrations of a similar kind seem gathered under the shadow of his castle,

on the day he uses them. They are like fresh-picked flowers, which have not yet felt the warmth of the bosom on which they glow. He finds them in every corner of the valley: "We do not advance in this life, we are carried along, like trifles floating on a stream; now lapsing gently, now hurrying rapidly, as the water is lively or slow." He is evidently down on the banks of the Didoire, which indeed, when I last ruffled its grassy banks, creating an image to flit by me through those solitudes—for our minds are the tombs from which ghosts come out to haunt the world—was here, whirling autumn leaves along in a narrow bed, there allowing them to rest in tiny reaches. But he goes further, and notices the progress which the Dordogne is making in eating away its banks, so as to carry off many houses by the foundations. This, and the destruction of his brother's estate in Medoc by the sea, enabled him to understand the supposed disappearance of the Atlantis.

La Boëtie had already humorously described a dog with a stick tied to his tail by village urchins. Montaigne has many of this class of observations. "It is a pastime to mothers," he notes, on returning from one of his villages, "to see a child wring the neck of a pullet, and eagerly attempt to wound a dog or a cat." Singularly enough, he was fond of hunting; yet his heart was touched by the sobbing of the hare in its agony when torn by the dogs, and he could never help feeling for the hunted deer. If he took an animal alive he restored it to liberty, like Pythagoras.

Most readers will remember a curious accident that happened to Rousseau, who, having been overthrown by a dog, took occasion thereon to found one of his most agreeable reveries. In his manner of relating the circumstance, he evidently imitates Montaigne; who has left a detailed account of a similar accident which befel him in the neighbourhood of his own castle. It was during the second or third troubles—he did not remember which. Feeling inclined to walk out, although in the very centre of the most disturbed districts of the kingdom, he ventured to the distance of a league. As he did not intend to wander far, or expect to have to ride for safety, he took with him a very easy-going, but not very steady horse, which one of his people led. Having finished his walk, he got into the saddle, and was jogging back in a leisurely manner, when suddenly one of his servants, a tall strong fellow, mounted on a powerful bay with a desperate mouth, fresh and vigorous, began to show off and gallop ahead of his companions. He so contrived as to follow Montaigne's path exactly, and came thundering like a Colossus "on the little man and the little horse." Down they both went, heels uppermost. Montaigne was thrown a dozen paces off on his back, his face wounded and torn, his sword dragged off, his girdle in tatters, without movement or consciousness more than the stump of a tree. The people with him tried in vain to bring him to himself, and then fancying he was dead, took him in their arms to carry him towards his house. On the road, after having been thought dead for two hours, he

moved and breathed, and being set on foot brought up, as it were, a pail full of blood. He describes most minutely and admirably his return to sensation and thought. He was dead, and came to life again. When he began to see, his sight was so troubled, so feeble, that he could distinguish nothing but light—no object. The functions of the soul reawakened in the same progressive manner as those of the body. He saw that he was bloody, and his first thought was, that he had been shot by an arquebus in the head; and it was true that he had heard several shots fired, not far off, as he fell. It seemed to him that life was fluttering on his lips. He says, that he shut his eyes to help it to go, and felt pleasure in giving way. The willingness to die floated superficially in his mind, like all other imaginations; but his feelings were not unpleasant, rather sweet than otherwise, like those who are sinking into sleep. This must be the sensation, he believed, of those who faint at the approach of death, whom we probably pity without reason, thinking them to be suffering from pain, or troubled with painful cogitations. "It has always been my opinion," he continues, "against that of many, and even of Estienne de la Boëtie, that those whom we see thus stupefied at the approach of death, though they may sigh and groan, are, in reality as it were, without feeling. If it were not so, I can imagine no state more insupportable or horrible than this,—to have the mind alive and afflicted, and no means of complaint."

On drawing near the château, Montaigne's wife and

family, to whom report of the accident had been carried, hastened out with the cries customary on such occasions. Not only did he answer something when they spoke to him, but even thought of ordering a horse to be given to his wife, whom he saw stumbling in the steep road. But he was not yet exactly conscious. He did not know whence he came, whither he was going, or what had happened. He saw his house without recognising it. When they put him to bed he felt infinite delight, for he had been terribly pulled about by the people who had taken the trouble to carry him in their arms by a very long and bad road, which tired several parties of them one after the other. All medicines offered him he refused, for he believed he had received a mortal wound in the head. According to his account, he was so near death and suffered so little, that he wished he had gone then. Two or three hours afterwards he woke back to complete life with pain; and suffered dreadfully for some nights. He never quite recovered from the shock. He notes, as curious, that the last thing he conceived clearly was how and when the accident happened. They tried to conceal what had caused it, in order to save the awkward servant from his anger; but on the second day he suddenly saw a vision, which flashed on him like lightning, of the man riding down upon him so rapidly, that not only had he no time to move out of the way, but not even to be afraid.

In another Essay he says:—"As I was passing yesterday through a village about two leagues from

my house, I found the place still hot from a miracle which had just been found out, and by which the neighbourhood had been amused for many months, so that distant provinces had begun to hear of the story, and were coming in great crowds to gratify their curiosity. A young man of the place, from mere wantonness, took one night to counterfeiting in his own house the voice of a spirit. As he succeeded better than he expected, in order to make the joke more complete, he took into partnership a stupid idiot of a village-girl, and then another, and after having played this game in private for some time, came to public exhibitions. They hid under the altar of the church, spoke only at night, and forbade any one to bring a light. They at first spoke of the conversion of the world and the day of judgment, but then said and did such ridiculous things that nothing so absurd could have occurred in the playing of little children. If, however, fortune had been a little more favourable, who knows how far this matter might have been pushed? These poor devils are now in prison, and will bear the penalty of public folly; and perhaps some judge will revenge upon them his own credulity."

Another time Montaigne says:—"Some peasants have just come to warn me in all haste that they have found in one of my forests a man covered with a hundred wounds, who called out for water and assistance to get up. But they did not dare to go near him, and fled away lest the justice-folks should seize them; in which case they would have been treated as it is customary to

treat people found near a murdered man, for they had no influence or money to prove their innocence. What can I say to them? It is certain this office of humanity might have brought trouble on them."

Elsewhere the Essayist notes the arrival at his castle of a little man from Nantes, born without arms, who had learned to use his feet instead, and did so most ingeniously. This man used to wander about, making a show of himself, and is mentioned by L'Etoile as being in Paris in 1586.

We see by these instances that the manuscript of the Essays, or even a printed copy, was always lying open on his table, and served him as a sort of journal, in which he jotted down, without dates, such curious things as he observed, and which happened to bear more or less on a subject he was treating, or had treated.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### PERSONAL DETAILS ON MONTAIGNE.

MONTAIGNE is looking at himself in the glass, and dictating what he observes, or thinks he observes. Perhaps his secretary is dozing over the desk in a corner, unconscious of the value of the words he is waiting to set down; and wondering whether there may not be a brighter and more profitable way of life than blackening paper with the twaddle of this egotistical master.—We need not join him in his criticisms; for so far we have only to use the Essays as storehouses of fact, mere reports, in which we must allow, on some unvarying principle, for the bias of the reporter.

Montaigne was under the middle size, and considered his diminutiveness not only ugly, but inconvenient for one obliged to fill offices of dignity. In form he was sturdy, and even squat. His face, though not fat, was full; his complexion "varied between the jovial and the melancholy—was moderately sanguine and warm." Up to forty, that is, during his active life, he was of excellent health, having rarely been afflicted with

maladies; but at forty, "when he began to be old," perhaps partly in consequence of the sudden change in his mode of life, he was no longer more than half himself. He had never been proficient in bodily exercises, except in running, in which he was tolerable. He had tried to improve in this exercise by adopting a bandage round the body, but found it of no use. In dancing, tennis, wrestling, he was but very moderately successful; and he could never learn to swim, to fence, or to leap, all which formed part of the military education of his time. His walk was rapid and firm. All these little communications suggest the picture of a quiet country gentleman, who would rather handle a book than a sword; and yet was fond of strolling and riding about, and might often be required to use his heels or his fist to save himself.

Montaigne possessed portraits of himself at the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, and wonders at the change that had taken place when he wrote his Essays. One of these portraits seems to be in the Museum at Versailles, where Montaigne is represented young. But his portrait was no doubt often executed afterwards; and I think he alludes to one wherein he is represented as bald and turning grey. As we have already seen, he employed an artist for some time at his château, who did the likeness of his daughter, and probably his own likewise.

When he was in Italy he had his portrait painted in oils, and brought it back with him. It was engraved by Saint-Aubin for the quarto edition of the "Travels."

Dr. Payen possesses another portrait, executed on wood. Beneath another, engraved by Thomas de Leu, occurs the following quatrain:—

> "Voici du grand Montaigne une entière figure,
> Le peintre a peint le corps, et lui son bel esprit:
> Le premier, par son art, égale la nature,
> Mais l'autre la surpasse en tout ce qu'il écrit."

These verses seem to have been an early production of Malherbe; perhaps the earliest, except his epigram on the enterprising flea that skipped to the bosom of Mademoiselle Desroches at Poitiers. It is curious to observe that the portrait to which they are appended has been turned the other way, and made to do duty for Olivier Delaunay, Chevalier of the Order of St. Michel, Conseiller, Superintendent and Controller-general of the Hostel of Madame Eleanor of Austria, Queen of France! I am told that Montaigne is sometimes represented in England *with his cat*,—a hint taken from Butler:—

> ("For Montaigne, playing with his cat,
> Complained she thought him but an ass.")

Our Essayist does not lay so much stress on the "purring diminutive lion," as a Pleiadist would say. He tells a story of a cat in a pie, and of a cat fascinating a bird. He also, in the passage to which Butler alludes, says, that if *he* thought that cats were created for his use, cats, on the other, thought that he was created to smooth them. But elsewhere he rather contemptuously notes, that no one takes pleasure in looking at the gambols of the inferior animals.

Montaigne, following the example of his father, always dressed in plain white or black, in opposition to the gaudy costume of his time. He liked to be tightly buttoned and braced up, yet pretends to consider dress a mere luxury that might be dispensed with. No gentleman, he says, should dress well at home. Nothing displeased him so much at the Court as its absurd costume, which was imitated by the rest of France,—the ugly hose, ugly and indelicate; the huge *pourpoint*, swelling out the body and concealing its natural shape; the long, effeminate tresses worn in front, whilst the back of the head was cropped according to a fashion just introduced.

It is amusing to notice how peevishly Montaigne speaks of the decrease of the natural heat of his body as he grew older; and how triumphantly he announces that as to his legs, he covered them still at a late period of life with a simple silk stocking. It was true that, on account of his colds, he had consented to clothe his head and body more carefully. He had passed, by many degrees, from a simple cap to a double hat. The padding of his *pourpoint* at last only served to give him a shape; he was obliged for warmth to add the skin of a hare or of a vulture. "If I go on like this, what shall I come to?" he says. "I am determined I won't do any more. If I dared, I would retract the concessions already made." But he was obliged to persevere, especially as he could not comfortably support the heat of a fire.

All this is very characteristic and amusing. In

deed, as I arrange these little confessions — these puerilities, if you will—I begin to see the man, despite the interval of time that separates me from him. I see him fussy, hypochondriacal, pedantic, and good-humoured; and can understand why students who have pored long over the Essays, without much caring for the period at which they were written, and which they reflect as a mirror with a thousand facets, should be somewhat indignant when proofs are brought forward that Montaigne was a courtier, a diplomatist, and a soldier. They think one set of facts destroys the other, from a romantic rather than an accurate view of human nature. Why do we hear people so often say that they find such and such a great man very different — meaning inferior — to what they had expected? His domestic habits and tribulations produce impressions on them quite different from those of his public or imaginary career. I have heard that a great poet of these times utterly fell in the opinion of a good judge, because he was seen toying in an unnecessary manner with his nose.

The fastidious writers of the seventeenth century, who rarely reached to Montaigne's waist, are very angry with his revelations. It is perfectly indifferent to them that the philosopher was fond of perfumes, and wore a *collet de fleurs*, or scented collar, even though he derives from his own experience curious observations on the dulling of the senses by habit. It is not, however, for his "improvements" that relishers of Montaigne are pleased with these con-

fessions. They like them, because in an infinitely delicate way they paint the man; or rather, in him exhibit ourselves in our fondest Narcissus moods, admiring and loving ourselves, and carefully passing, as it were, a microscope, fitted to discover beauties, not blemishes, over our whole being. Montaigne loved good smells, and hated beyond measure evil ones. This is not the point. But the man comes completely before us, when he goes on to analyse and note all the circumstances dependent on his partiality. He likes simple and natural odours best. But odours of all kinds have a particular aptitude for clinging to him. It is astonishing how his skin absorbs them, and how, his moustaches being particularly large, they hang about them, so that if he puts up his gloves or handkerchief, all saturated with perfume, they preserve the smell throughout the day! These self-same moustaches, with their perfume-collecting qualities, were very tell-tales. They betrayed where he had been; and the close kisses of youth, sweet, eager, and adhesive, used to cling to them, and hover there for hours after! Is this mere twaddle? Or do we not feel drawn by sympathy towards this old philosopher, sitting up in his tower, and allowing his thoughts to meander backwards towards such tender moments, leaning his brow against his window-panes, with the shadows of past times flitting athwart his mind? Who will not subscribe, likewise, to his observation, that incense, wafted in silvery clouds through the dim religious light of cathedrals, rejoices the soul, awakens and purifies the

senses, and renders us more fit for contemplation and prayer? Montaigne gives as a reason for liking less to live in Paris than he should otherwise have done, — the disagreeable smell of its mud.

It is in this tone that he tells us all about his personal habits, his prejudices, and his antipathies. He talks of people who affected to fear the smell of apples more than the detonation of an arquebuse, to be terrified at a mouse, to be ill at the sight of cream: he had cured himself of all these things, except an aversion to beer. Nothing concerning him does he think unworthy of being set down. He often felt inclined to abuse himself aloud; was awkward in many things; could not play music, nor sing; could scarcely dance, or fold a letter, or mend a pen, or carve meat, or saddle a horse. He could not remember his dreams; swore by God; feared dew, but liked rain like ducks; was irritated if a slipper went wrong, or the thong of his saddle; liked to rest with his legs in the air, and was fond of scratching his ears!

Montaigne gives us the most minute account of his taste in cookery, which he calls "the science of the gullet." He liked fish, and observes that that aliment had always enjoyed the especial privilege of being attended to, and even cooked, by great people. He liked salt-meat, but would not allow salt to be put in his bread; which was baked, of course, at home. He liked meat underdone, but not hard. In wine he was very particular, and talks so much about it that he sometimes produces the impression that he must

have been a bibber. Yet not so. He drank usually about three demi-setiers at a meal, but put a third, or half water. In imitation of his father, who had been ordered to this by his doctor, he had his wine mixed by his butler two or three hours before the repast.

Sometimes he has a fancy for red wine, sometimes for white. "What the deuce is that to us?" cries his friend Dupuy indignantly. Yet readers now-a-days are not offended by these confessions, however much some may be by their critic. Montaigne knew a man who seldom drank anything, and when he was ill himself he disliked wine.

Montaigne says he was hungry only at table — uses the phrase *l'appétit vient en mangeant;* came to table some time after the others, because he did not like to sit long, and was averse to seeing many dishes on the table, thinking a crowd of dishes as bad as any other crowd; ate hastily, and often bit his tongue and his fingers. These are specimens of the minutiæ to which he descends; but it is useless to catalogue them all; for who would not rather read them in the Essays?

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE ESSAYIST PAINTS HIS OWN MORAL PORTRAIT.

MONTAIGNE has been so copious in revelations as to his character, that we are at first sight inclined to believe that no man can be better known. This is not so. No man has been appreciated more differently. I have never read a character of him, however eloquently and copiously written, which did not leave an impression of incompleteness, as if the writer had indeed looked at him from one, two, many points of view, but had neglected some of the most essential. There is also a vagueness, a generality, in the qualities attributed to him, which arises from the fact that Montaigne, even when he uses the first person most perseveringly, oftener describes Man than his own individual character; yet his own statements are generally taken as the colours with which to paint, without any allowance for the errors necessarily incident to observations of self—errors, the amount of which a moralist should be able to establish with some precision.

It will be curious to collect the chief admissions, confessions, or boasts, that Montaigne makes about himself, in order to see how far they go to make a portrait. At the outset he tells us that he was marvellously inclined to mercy and mansuetude; and the humane tone of all his writings assures us that he did not take credit where credit was not due. He writes against torture in an age when men were a prey to a sort of furious panic, produced by the discovery that they had been living in a fabric, all the foundations of which were not solid as a rock—that some of the chambers in which their souls were wont to take refuge were domed with vapour instead of marble, and that there was a heaven dimly blue and fearfully vast beyond. During this period of delusion the people, accustomed by the schools to divide men and things, and class them under names, against the definitions of which there was no appeal, seem really to have believed that to be called Albigeois, Atheist, Free-Thinker, Huguenot, Protestant, or Reformer, was equivalent to a sort of transubstantiation, according to which human flesh, that appeals to our love, becomes demon's flesh, to be lacerated and mangled at pleasure. It required great natural tenderness—the same feeling that made Montaigne, amidst brutal sportsmen, be touched by the sobbing of the hare in its agony, torn by the dogs, and feel like Jaques for the hunted deer, and suffer at seeing a pullet killed—to allow the idea that torture might be a sin to penetrate his mind in that violent time. He

considered cruelty "the extreme of all vices," and says that public executions, however just they may be, he could never look firmly at. But we must remember with all this, if we would understand Montaigne and his time, that he was for many years member of a Parliament which had much innocent blood on its head, that he was a friend of the Guises and of the blood-stained Montluc, and always spoke with reverence and affection of those who carried out the Saint Bartholomew.

Montaigne informs us that he was exempt from sadness; but this was when in the prime of life, having as yet scarcely learned what illness or pain was, he was beginning to speculate in a high stoical tone. As we go on, melancholy strains gradually mingle with his triumphant music. In the third book we miss more and more the liveliness of the earlier Essays. He begins to complain painfully, hungers after variety, seems to grow querulous. Then a cheerful gleam breaks in: "One of my teeth has just given way," says he, "without pain, without effort. That was the natural term of its duration. God is merciful to those from whom he takes life by little parcels. The last death will be less disagreeable."

He was not subject to violent passions, and laboured to deaden what he had by reason—rarely or never wept, though he felt sometimes inclined to, not from sorrow, but imitation; yet, as we have seen, he was capable of being carried away by indig-

nation, even in matters for which he pretended to have a contempt. In his household he was often heard to storm and scold, but his anger was easily appeased. Injuries left little impression on him. I think he was even too prone to forgive injuries against right and humanity. The ballast of his character seems to have been a kind of constitutional temperance. But he admits that he yielded to certain vices, whilst others he avoided as if he were a saint. He compounded for sins he was inclined to, not by damning, but by avoiding others. He was not revengeful, not resentful; inherited hatred of lying from his father; was not proud, though a little inclined to that vice from temperament; was not cruel, treacherous, a thief, or a drunkard; had never afflicted or ruined any one; nor exercised vengeance, nor been guilty of envy, nor publicly offended the laws, nor introduced novelty or trouble, nor broken his word; had never laid his hand on the goods or the purse of any Frenchman, either in war or peace, and had never failed to pay for services rendered: but he was somewhat rough, inclined to disdain politeness; indifferent to others not immediately attached to him by friendship, so as not to care even to open their letters; rather irresolute, a characteristic exhibited in his writings; inclined in his youth to debauchery, of which he cured himself in middle life, but relapsed towards it in inclination as he grew older. "I admire," he says, in his off-hand, impudent way, "the chastity of the Feuillans and Capuchins, just because

they are different from me." In that age, for a gentleman to speak otherwise would have been looked upon as hypocrisy. As has been already remarked, Montaigne accuses himself only of those faults which few are offended at having revealed, and attributes to himself all the virtues which make a man honourable and respectable. His opinions on morals were early settled and fixed. In consequence of this, he says, —setting aside certain temporary yieldings to great passions,—his course of life and his actions were uniform, and he therefore deemed he had little to repent. He would rather have been an angel or a Cato, but he cannot repent that he was not. His own conscience he thought sufficient arbiter of his own actions; to be just in one's own breast he deemed the highest degree of virtue—the next degree was to be just in one's own house. He evidently, despite the liberty he arrogated to himself, felt galled at times by the bonds of society. He would have accommodated himself easily to the careless life of savage nations, and every now and then shows a yearning for the new kind of existence which his friend had once pointed out to him. *His* heart, too, leaped towards Utopia in desponding moods! But anon we find him regretting the bustling life of court, and persuading himself that he was born to shine there. This is no contradiction. As he somewhere says: "If I speak diversely of myself, it is that I look diversely at myself." On the whole, perhaps, he was right when he said that his manners were far less intemperate

than his speculations: his moderation in one licensed him, as it where, to be less fastidious in the other. When he did exceed the limits of what he considered propriety, it was far less than most people; and he judged more severely of his own actions than of those of others.

But, after all, descriptions of character are always unsatisfactory. However temperately written, with due sacrifice of antithesis, they ever produce the impression of a jumble or chaos,—unless conceived in a tone of panegyric or vituperation, in which case they are worthless. The reason, of course, is in the irregularity and inconsistency of human nature; and the impossibility, in so vast and varying a subject as man, of seizing all gradations. In the most elaborately written portraits of St. Simon we have to proceed by break-neck leaps, as it were, and are frequently surprised to find ourselves now on a pinnacle, now in an abyss. Montaigne's character was more complete than that of most men, and more uniform. His was a sort of Mediterranean mind, with weak tides. There have been minds of vaster expanse, whose energies seem now to huddle down in the centre, like the ocean, now to brim up to overflowing. He was more equable and constant, and almost deserved the title of a philosopher. But his character will be best understood from the Essays, if we notice less what he says of himself and more the tone in which he says it. We have but to read and the impression of worth will gradually be made, even if criticism discovers many

faults and shortcomings. As to Montaigne's Egotism, it was of a peculiar sort. He loved himself, but felt kindly towards the world. I have no doubt he often did good, because doing good is an enjoyment. Ordinary selfishness repels; but the selfishness of Montaigne seems to make him more amiable. There is something feminine about it; but, more than this, we feel it to be a flattered portrait, that will bear public exhibition, of our own cruel indifference to the wants and sufferings of our fellow-creatures.

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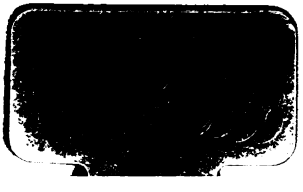
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